

The Relationship Between Literature and Language Revitalization: “RewiTEATRali-zacja” in Wilamowice*

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This article discusses the case of revitalization of the Wymysorys language, spoken in Wilamowice, Poland, where literacy not only plays a role in education-oriented proficiency development, but also where literature is utilized in the learning process and adapted for the purpose of theatrical performances. The authors argue that engagement in these literature-based theatrical activities promotes and expedites language entrenchment that usually develops gradually in ‘normal’ conversational contexts, which are usually lacking in cases of severe language endangerment. The paper addresses the theoretical and practical disparity regarding the role of literature in RLS activities (Fishman 1991), which emphasizes spoken language and ‘natural’ intergenerational language transmission.

Introduction

In the literature on language shift and revitalization, there is often heavy emphasis on the importance of and promotion of spoken language in informal, “everyday” domains, especially those involving child rearing, in order to increase or restore intergenerational transmission of an endangered language. The written forms of an endangered languages in these scenarios, while “welcome guests” that provide symbolic support for revitalization goals, are not generally considered to play a significant role in the restoration of language transmission (Fishman 1991, 96, 110). The now oft cited work of Fishman (1991), and the numerous works that take a similar “first things first” approach to language revitalization, posits a hierarchical relationship between understanding and speaking a language on the one hand, and reading and writing a language on the other (Fishman 1991, 43); revitalization must, according to Fishman (Fishman 1991, 109) “repair” lower, foundational stages before [i.e. understanding and speaking] moving ahead to more advanced ones [i.e. reading and writing]”. Initial focus on reading and writing will fail “because these steps are hollow victories and must ultimately crumble unless they rest upon the strong base of the

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informal, intimate spoken language in daily family, neighborly and community interaction” (Fishman 1991, 110).

In this paper, we want to emphasize the crucial role that written-language forms can have in efforts to revitalize an endangered language and present the case of Wymysorys. Literature and written forms of Wymysorys play a key role in language education, proficiency development, and language practice associated with the revitalization efforts in Wilamowice. These forms are utilized as examples and / or translation targets in the Wymysorys didactic process, adapted for theatre, and then staged publically in the local and national arena. The process of preparing and staging these spectacles provides goal-oriented motivation for language learning, a venue for language practice and social cohesion, and normalizes the presence of the language in public space and in doing so also encourages positive attitudinal shift in the wider society. For those directly involved, regular engagement with literary forms and in theatre activities promotes and expedites entrenchment that usually develops gradually in “normal” acquisitional contexts via consistent exposure, regular repetition and rehearsal, which is lacking in this case and other cases of severe language endangerment. Entrenchment, or the strength of linguistic representation (lexical and grammatical) in executive function, is a necessary prerequisite for the development of fluency necessary to transmit a the language to the subsequent generation (Schmid 2016; Diependaele, Lemhöfer, and Brysbaert 2013).

As can be inferred from previous sentence, as an end-game, successful language revitalization results in an increase or restoration of naturalistic intergenerational language transmission. As a process, however, language revitalization involves both fluency building and creating new domains and scenarios for usage of the language. While it is often the case that authenticity and purity of a language is benchmarked by varieties produced by so-called “native speakers”, it is a topical issue whether or not this is ideal, or even possible, in scenarios of language revitalization. In the case of Wilamowice, the majority of those involved in language revitalization are young people who could be considered new speakers. A new speaker here refers to an individual who has learned, or is learning a shifting language outside of the domestic context (O’Rourke, Pujolar & Ramallo 2015; O’Rourke 2018). As a relatively recent addition to the sociolinguistic toolkit (O’Rourke and Pujolar 2013; O’Rourke and Ramallo 2013; Hornsby 2015; Nance 2015; O’Rourke, Pujolar, and Ramallo 2015; O’Rourke and Pujolar 2015; Hornsby 2016; Hornsby 2017; Nance et al. 2016; Kasstan 2017; Dołowy-Rybińska 2016; Dołowy-Rybińska 2017; Smith-Christmas, Hornsby, and Moriarty 2018), the new speaker concept offers a paradigmatic shift away from focus on “native speakers” and “nativeness” in minority-language contexts (O’Rourke 2018). And although there are a number of living individuals who could be considered native speakers of Wymysorys, we have chosen to focus on the group of young new speakers because they are the main actors in the language revitalization activities.

In the next Section, we briefly present contextual information about Wymysorys, its endangerment, and revitalization efforts. In the following section, we provide an overview of the local youth theatre group — Ufa Fisa — in ethnographic-historical perspective as it relates language revitalization efforts in

Wilamowice. Then we present narratives from New Speakers of Wymysorys regarding their engagement with Ufa Fisa and how they perceive the relationship between theatre, literature, and language revitalization within the frame of interpretative phenomenological analysis. From this, we argue that contact with literature and written forms of the language in general, as well as the social and cognitive aspects of producing theatrical performances are fundamental to language revitalization efforts in Wilamowice.

Language context: endangerment and revitalization

Wymysorys (Eng.: alternative Vilamovian, Pol.: język wilamowski, endonym: Wymysiöeryś) is a West Germanic language, spoken primarily in and around one town, Wilamowice, in the Silesian Voivodeship (Bielsko county) of Poland (Wicherkiewicz 2003; Hammarström, Forkel, and Haspelmath 2018). The area was settled in the 13th century by migrants from Western Europe, most probably originating from Frisian areas around the Elbe and / or Flanders. Because the area was quite thinly populated, settlers were invited from overpopulated Germanic speaking areas, and provided financial incentives to relocate by local nobility (Barciak 2001, 82-85). From that time, a unique multilingual culture developed and flourished in the area. Throughout its history, Wilamowice and its people straddled borders, and residents of the town utilized this position by establishing wide-reaching trade networks, especially dealing in textiles and horses (Wicherkiewicz 2003, 10). The townspeople lived within a system of functional polyglossia where Wymysorys was widely used in the home and private situations, Polish used for religion and education, and later (under Austrian administration) German was used for commerce and administration (Ritchie 2012, 2016; Wicherkiewicz 2003; Neels 2012).

The vitality of Wymysorys became severely threatened following the Second World War. During the war, residents of the town were ascribed status of Category 2, “of German descent”, or Category 3, “Voluntarily Germanized” on the *Deutsche Volksliste* “German Peoples List” (Wicherkiewicz 2003). In principle this was voluntary, but in practice those who did not volunteer faced severe punishment. Despite the fact that Vilamovian people did not identify with Germany or Germanness, an idea for which there is pre-war evidence, the Red Army and post-war communist government used the *Volksliste* as a weapon against those who had been ascribed to it (Wicherkiewicz 2003, 2001). In the case of Wilamowice, this meant that the language and any culturally distinct expressions (e.g. folk costumes) were banned outright in 1945; perpetrators of language and culture were regularly outed to authorities by ethnically Polish neighbors, and faced evictions, imprisonment, exile, or execution (Wicherkiewicz 2003). As such, community members were required to hide their identities, even within extended families, in order to survive. With this, people ceased using and teaching the language to their children; intergenerational transmission was abruptly stifled.

Wicherkiewicz’s ominous prediction (2000, repeated in 2003 and other works) that Wymysorys would not survive the next decade, formed part of the motivation that caused Tymoteusz Król (b. 1993) to begin recording audio of the language as spoken by his grandmother and her friends in 2004, eventually

amassing around 1000 hours of audio recordings of elderly speakers of Wymysorys, many of whom are no longer living. Around 2007, Tymoteusz Król and his close friend Justyna Majerska (b.1993), recognizing the damning lack of didactic materials for Wymysorys, began developing these materials based on the audio recordings and teaching the language to other children on a private basis. Some of these didactic materials were eventually published (Majerska 2014; *fum* Döcker, Wicherkiewicz, and *fum* Biöetuł 2015; Król, Majerska, and Wicherkiewicz 2016). Thanks to the continued efforts of Król and Majerska, along with subsequent institutional support from Polish universities and the European Union,¹ there are now approximately twenty-five individuals who self-identify as new speakers of Wymysorys. Teaching Wymysorys continues on a private basis, though there have been intermittent instances of the language being taught as an extracurricular activity in the local elementary school, even at University of Warsaw, and active communities of practice (Wenger 1999) have developed around a local cultural heritage association, theatre group, and folk ensemble. Detailed overviews of the progression of language revitalization in Wilamowice can be found in Wicherkiewicz & Olko (2016) and Wicherkiewicz, Król & Olko (2017).

These actions have sparked promising developments with regard to the survival of Wymysorys. In addition to the growing number of active new speakers numbers, there has been shift in attitudes towards greater acceptance of the language within the community and in the wider society. Anxiety surrounding the use of language and local customs brought about by post-war events is easing. Neels describes the prevalence of “double identity” among older speakers (Neels 2012: 128-131), which is also strongly evident among the new speakers who participated in this study. Local activists struggle for recognition from the Polish government as a linguistic minority, but the association with the “Germanness” and the *volksliste* continue to be used as tools for marginalization in the current discourse of far-right conservative nationalism.² Those new speakers who participated in the current study report that they plan continue with their engagement with local language and culture regardless of negative popular attitudes or the threatening political climate.

RewiTEATRalizacja: new speakers and the literature connection

Theatre has been identified as a crucial ingredient in at least some language revitalization programs. Baker (2018), for instance, outlines the centrality of Hawaiian-medium theatre in reinvigorating a sense of local identity and creating contexts for exposure to the Hawaiian language. In Wilamowice, theatre and language revitalization are also integrally linked, hence our use of the word “rewiTEATRalizacja”, which is a blend of two Polish words *rewitalizacja* ‘revitalization’ and *teatr* ‘theatre’. The local theatre group *Ufa Fisa*, lit. ‘on [one’s] feet’, began during preparations for the international conference “Endangered languages: Comprehensive models for language revitalization”; some youth from the folk ensemble “Wilamowice” and Association “Wilamowianie” were preparing the artistic program with the main goal not to make yet another traditional dance and song show. In addition to making something innovative and exciting, there was an explicit intent to challenge negative ideologies surrounding the public use of Wymysorys. The idea was proposed

to stage a Wymysorys-language play along with the planned Wymysorys-English exhibition about local language and culture (which demonstrated that Wymysorys could appear without regionally dominant languages, Polish and German); it was met with many negative reactions.

There was concern that such a play would not be understood by anyone. Also memories of recent conflicts around the usage of Wymysorys were fresh in the minds of many people involved, for example when the local priest banned the Way of the Cross in Wymysorys (2010) and the reading of a Wymysorys poem at the funeral of a poet who wrote in Wymysorys (2013). But Król decided to organize it anyway and wrote a script based on *The Little Prince* by Antoine Saint Exupéry.³ Such a well-known text was chosen because it should not be very difficult to understand. The children who had been learning Wymysorys studied the text, but they said that it was too hard for them to memorize at their level of proficiency. So papers with text were hidden in sleeves, hats or under the table. Many people had serious doubts whether or not it would work, but the group decided to continue with the production anyway.

Contrary to critics' expectations, the international participants of the conference and local Vilamovians who came to take part in open events all enjoyed the play. One very important factor was participation of Carlo Ritchie, a young Australian comedian who lived in Wilamowice for two months in order to learn Wymysorys. He returned after two years to play the role of the Fox. Ritchie's acting he removed many negative emotions and fears of not being understandable, which troubled the other young actors. The play was considered one of the most important aspects of the conference. Most of the children who participated are members of the folk ensemble "Wilamowice", which was established 1948 served as a means for the conservation of parts of Vilamovian culture — but this organization was only a shield, under which the identity and the language was transferred to young generations. With the successful staging of the Wymysorys version of *The Little Prince*, the theatrical group Ufa Fisa was born.

When preparations for the Mother tongue day event (2015) in Wilamowice began, there was no question that another theatrical play in Wymysorys should be presented during the event. The main goal of the play should address the persistent negative language ideologies surrounding the use of Wymysorys by presenting something "cool". It was decided to stage a version of *The Hobbit* because, at the time, the film version was in cinemas and many Vilamovian youths were fascinated by Tolkien's Middle-Earth. Like the rendition of *The Little Prince*, the audience enjoyed the play and many old Vilamovians were proud that they were able to follow what was going on on the stage while their children had to ask them to explain what was happening. Polish subtitles were presented on a screen to one side of the stage, but the whole performance was staged in Wymysorys. The special effects, costumes, and props, made by Justyna Majerska-Schneider and Rafał Schneider, were so impressive, that many young Vilamovians said that it was really cool. One Vilamovian woman aged 35 reported:

After I saw *The Little Prince* in Wymysorys, I understood, that Wymysorys could be used on the stage, but it was nothing more as a school play. So as I went to see the

Hobbit in Wymysorys, I was sceptical. But now I see, that Wymysorys can be used on the stage but as well, that it sounds great, especially in such scenery as Middle-Earth! [Po tym, jak zobaczyłam Małego Księcia po wilamowsku, zrozumiałam, że wilamowski może być użyty na scenie, ale to było takie szkolne przedstawienie. Jak poszłam na Hobbita po wilamowsku, to nie byłam pewna, jak to będzie. Ale teraz widzę, że wilamowski może być nie tylko użyty na scenie, ale też brzmi świetnie i pasuje bardzo do Śródziemia!]

The play was so successful, that the group was invited by the Polish National Theatre in Warsaw to present it there in 2016. It garnered attention of Polish websites about Tolkien and it was called one of the most important Tolkien-events in Poland in 2016.

For the next performance, the group wanted to showcase a local piece of literature in order to show that this aspect of local history based around a Vilamovian story could make for an interesting play. A script was developed around a long poem called *Uf jer welt* by Vilamovian poet Florian Biesik, which was based on *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri. The play encompassed three parallel stories: 1. the travel from heaven, via purgatory, to hell as in the original poem; 2. the story of a conflict between Florian, who considered Wymysorys to be a distinct language, and his brother, Hermann, who authored the first Vilamovian dictionary and considered it to be a dialect of German; 3. the story of the manuscript's discovery in Wilamowice in 1989 by a student of linguistics, Tomasz Wicherkiewicz. These three local-based stories bound by the mysterious poem made for a captivating story, which was interesting not only for Vilamovians, who could recognize themselves or their relatives, but also for foreigners, who could learn more about Vilamovian culture. Like *The Hobbit*, *Uf jer Welt* made its debut at A fieldschool, organized in Wilamowice in 2016, and later staged at a Mother Tongue Day event 2017 and was then, by invitation, in the Polish National Theatre in Warsaw.

As we saw increased engagement among the young actors, we left them to work on the next script themselves. They authored a script around events from life stories their grandparents and great-grandparents, set around the second world war, which they heard first hand or from recordings of the older people. This play — *Ymertihla* — is a life story of a Vilamovian woman, Anna, who was living a generally happy life before the war. She spends her time with her Vilamovian father and Jewish friends in Wilamowice and her fiancé — later husband — a Vilamovian Viennese (Vienna had a large Vilamovian community at the time). Her father says directly, that he is not Pole, not German, he is Vilamovian, but the German occupation forced them to sign the *Volksliste*. Then they rescue a Polish man, who should have been sent to Germany for mandatory work. Then after the war, Anna and her family are expelled to labour camps by local Poles, including the man, who was rescued by her. This man takes her house and farm, and sends her husband to Siberia, where he dies in a Soviet labour camp (though she never finds out what happened to him). Later he is forced to their farm, but kills her father on the street. In later scenes, Anna is old and alone and her relatives do not want to speak Wymysorys. They identify as Poles and they are blinded by the recent wave of Polish nationalistic ideology, but then, she meets children, who learn Wymysorys as a part of language revitalization program. They ask her questions about her life and although she says

that it would last very long, they assure her that they have enough time for her. The last scene shows her shawl on a mannequin in a museum in Wilamowice as a symbol of the hope of the Vilamovian youth that such a museum and recognition of local history will soon come to existence.

The script was written entirely by the actors, relying on their family stories, tales and memoirs, which conflict with official, school-history, and more widely accepted historical narratives. They included Vilamovian Jews, showing a Jewish-Vilamovian wedding, which ended with scenes of deportations and subsequent holocaust. Then they showed the postwar ban of use of Wymysorys, vilamovian folk dress, and the Polish persecutors, expulsions of Vilamovians and postwar camps, which were organized in the same places like the Nazi camps. These, especially the latter, are very controversial themes in the current Political climate of Poland following a rise in the Extreme-Right. In the play Vilamovians (catholics and Jews) speak Wymysorys, Germans German, and Poles Polish. Young authors treat these three nationalities equally, against historically German nationalism and actual Polish politics which forced Vilamovians to be a part of a bigger nation.

Ymertihla (which is a particular kind of shawl in Vilamovian folk dress - an example of this type of shawl appears in every scene) made its debut at the Mother Tongue Day event in 2018. After the play, the audience was crying and rethinking their youth memories, many Vilamovians said, that they could see on the stage, what had happened for them for seventy years and that they are happy, that the young people have sighted their life stories. Many of them said, that they recognize their particular family story in the plot. But there were local politicians, who did not like it, because "it is moving some part of history unnecessary". As the play was shown in the Polish Theatre in Warsaw, the mayor of Wilamowice said to audience, that he does not agree with the facts, that were shown in the play.

The newest play is a comedy called *Ojeruma*, based on local tales about Vilamovians traveling to many far-away countries to trade and returning with some elements foreign cultures to Wilamowice. This play, based on local stereotypes about other nations — Turks, Poles, Russians, French, Scots, Germans and Austrians among them — was very funny for the audience and thanks to code-switching on the stage. This production was understandable for all, even if they do not speak Wymysorys. It was important that these young people are also included in local activism as well. The fact, that this play was funny and "cool" for the young generation continues to have positive influence to local language ideologies and language attitudes surrounding Wymysorys. In the play one can see strong Vilamovian identity of some characters, which is shown not only in the language, folk dress and local tales, but in other values like tolerance against non-heteronormativity; one of characters seems to be gay, which is not by accident. Young Vilamovians see the rising homophobia in Poland (an artistic construction of a rainbow produced in Wilamowice and situated in Warsaw, got burnt a couple of times by Polish nationalists)⁴ and they want to show their local identity as something obverse to it. One of the local activist, for instance, has organized workshops against homophobia for the actors of the group in August 2018. *Ojeruma* made its debut on Mother Tongue Day

in Wilamowice on 2019. Unlike the case of *Ymertihła*, the audience was not moved by sad memories, but amused by a very funny plot and gags.

The development of Ufa Fisa has provided Vilamovian youth with an infrastructure for language revitalization. Through it they have been able to address and affect change in local language ideologies, which had been unfavorable to the use of Wymysorys, while developing a means to exercise their own agentivity and stake claims of symbolic ownership in matters of local language, culture and self-identity. The group provides a forum and a practical goal-oriented community of practice around which the bonds of social cohesion are formed and maintained. Around these common goals, agentive and situated language learning takes place via the authoring or translation of scripts and the conscious rehearsal and memorization of individuals' roles — *conscious* in the sense that the learning of lines also entails the learning of vocabulary and grammar.

New speaker perspectives on theatre as a part of the language-learning process

In this section, we present an abbreviated analysis of new speakers' perspectives on the role of engagement with literature, and specifically the theatre group in their learning process. We rely heavily on interviews with new speakers conducted by Robert Borges in 2017-2018. These interviews were part of a more extensive data collection protocol that aimed to document new speaker sociolinguistic profiles; by following standard data collection procedures multiple times with the same speakers, it was also the intention to observe development of proficiency, the spread of innovation within the speech community, and ultimately changes in the Wymysorys lexicon and grammatical structure. These procedures employed a variety of elicitation tools and data types; while overall analyses of these data follow principles of mixed methods, here we focus on qualitative aspect of interviews. More specifically, we look at how study participants construct their own experience as new speakers of Wymysorys within the framework of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This analytical technique assumes that "[h]uman beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather [that] they come to interpret and understand their world by formulating their own biographical stories into a form that makes sense to them" (Brocki and Wearden 2006). As an inherently subjective method for qualitative analysis, we rely on personal narratives that focus on individuals' experiences as well as our own interpretation as researchers, to identify salient, recurring themes that represent "insider perspective" empirically (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin 2005).

IPA has most typically been used in the field of health psychology, but as a method, is particularly suited for data collected among small focus groups of individuals regarding a particular shared experience using semi-structured interviews, it has more recently been utilized in other related fields (Smith 1996; Brocki and Wearden 2006). As our data are from a relatively small sample of individuals involved in language revitalization, we find IPA to be an ideal framework for making an exploratory / relatively atheoretical analysis of the new speaker experience that relies heavily on verbatim excerpts (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin 2005). In the remainder of this section, we present three recurrent themes that were prevalent in the interviews: self identity and "ownership" of Wymysorys, the role of text in the learning process, and specifically the role of

the theatre group's activities in the learning process.

One of the most important outcomes of the theatre group, and to some extent the folk ensemble, in regards to Wymysorys language revitalization efforts has to do with a positive shift in attitudes about the language, as indicated in the previous section. The activities of these two groups have played a definitive role in making Wymysorys and Vilamovian cultural heritage something "cool" that young people can be proud of and of which they assume a kind of ownership. This fosters a strong sense of group cohesion and is an affirmation of local identity, which is arguably equally important, if not more so, to early language revitalization efforts as a population of speakers with some degree of fluency. Assertion of this bond to Wilamowice was common in the interview data.

And I was born here and I feel very attached to this place... I just love this place and I feel that if I was born in another family in another city I would be only half of myself. [No i urodziłam się tutaj i czuję się bardzo mocno związana z tym miejscem... Po prostu kocham to miejsce i czuję, że jakbym urodziła się w innej rodzinie, w innym mieście, to byłabym tylko połową siebie.]

This seems to be related to aspects of a sense of uniqueness engrained in self-identity, which is inherently tied to 'the local'; uniqueness within the shared Vilamovian identity is perceived with certainty.

We have recently started with the girls. Sometimes we write in Wymysorys with each other or sometimes we will find out that something is there to say so others did not understand. [Zaczęłyśmy ostatnio tak z dziewczynami. Czasem piszemy po wilamowsku ze sobą albo też czasem się nam zdarzy, że coś tam pomówić żeby inni nie rozumieli.]

If we are somewhere and we do not want anyone to know what we are talking about, then sometimes we speak Wymysorys. [Jak jesteśmy gdzieś i nie chcemy, żeby ktoś wiedział o czym mówimy, to czasem sobie właśnie po wilamowsku mówimy.]

More practically speaking, these activities provide a community of practice around which those people who can speak actually meet and work together towards a goal while collectively involving and improving language competence.

One major objective, in this regard, is the translation and/or authoring of the script for productions and lyrics for accompanying music. Getting texts ready for production provides some urgency to these activities, which were mentioned by all study participants as one of the main means by which they are active in improving their language abilities.

Well, but translation helps a lot, for example, through July, we ran like a small office in which in the heritage building and there the three of us translated texts. [No, ale też sporo daje tłumaczenie, na przykład, przez lipiec prowadziliśmy sobie tak jakby małe biuro, w którym w Dziedzictwie i tam tłumaczyliśmy sobie tak w trójkę teksty.]

Just these translations also helped me a lot, I got to know a lot of useful words that come in handy in an ordinary conversation, not just the ones I've been learning in classes, but just the more mundane, what ladies say, so it was very cool. [Właśnie te tłumaczenia też mi dużo pomogły. Poznałam dużo przydatnych słów, które się przydają w zwykłej rozmowie, nie tylko takich, co się uczyłam na lekcjach, tylko takich bardziej przyjemnych, też co mówią jakieś panie, więc to było bardzo fajne.]

Certainly I learned a lot of new words thanks to this [involvement with the theatre] because, together with Ola, we translated the part of the script together, so you could also attribute a lot of grammar and vocabulary precisely to that. [Na pewno poznałam dużo nowych słów dzięki temu, bo też do najnowszego spektaklu, razem z Olą tłumaczyłyśmy część scenariusza, więc, no, też wtedy dużo aspektem gramatycznymi słownictwa też dużo tego mógłbyś odwieźć wynieść przy okazji właśnie tego.]

Improving one's language abilities by engagement with written forms of the language during free time —*whenever I have a spare moment*— was also a prevalent theme in the interviews. In addition to contact with literature related to theatre productions, contact with Wymysory through transcription of previously collected recordings under the auspices of the *Documentation of Linguistic and Cultural Heritage of Wilamowice* project was also frequently mentioned as a means by which new speakers could maintain and improve their language abilities.

I finished high school, I took my high school exam. I practically had 5 months of holidays. As part of the additional work I did transcription of Wymysorys, so I kept the contact with it all the time. I listened all the time I did not write if I did not know how you feel or write I can check the word in the dictionary, so I have certainly got a few words from the dictionary, so I definitely improved. [Skończyłem szkołę średnią, napisałem maturę. Miałem 5 miesięcy wolnego, praktycznie, wakacji, to w ramach pracy dodatkowej, robiłem transkrypcje z języka wilamowskiego. Więc ja cały czas miałem z nim styczność, bo cały czas go słuchałem, cały czas nim pisałem. Jeżeli coś nie wiedziałem jak się czujesz pisze albo jakie to może być słowo, sprawdzałem w słowniku, więc też ze słownika parę słów na pewno nabyłem, więc na pewno się poprawilem.]

We made such small offices just here upstairs and throughout the holidays every day we went through to translate these texts that we got from the University of Warsaw and we had daily contact with Wymysorys, 7 hours every day, so it seems to me that it also helped a lot, for sure. [Zrobiliśmy sobie takie małe biura, właśnie tutaj na górze, i przez całe wakacje codziennie przychodziliśmy tłumaczyć właśnie te teksty, co to mamy tam z Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego i codziennie był ten kontakt z wilamowskim, po 7 godzin, więc wydaje mi się, że to też dużo dało, na pewno.]

A common theme in the interviews is also that the rehearsal of theatrical productions also makes a lasting impact in cognitive aspects of language learning. Most participants gave examples of how vocabulary items or grammatical structures became entrenched due to memorizing lines and practicing / performing the theatre productions.

Well, this helps because you remember some characteristic phrases, for example, a friend at the first show, the one of the larger ones or Hobbit, said in such a distinctive voice "wos ej dos" and that's why a lot of people remembered this phrase... Well, you just remember a lot of words after the performances, from your part, or others' characteristic parts too. [No tak, to pomaga, bo pamiętasz jakieś charakterystyczne zwroty, na przykład, koleżanka przy pierwszym przedstawieniu, takim tym z tych większych czy Hobbicie, powiedziała takim charakterystycznym głosem, mówiła "wos ej dos" i w sumie, dzięki temu, dużo osób zapamiętało ten zwrot... No, ale właśnie pamięta się sporo słówek po przedstawieniach, ze swojej kwestii właśnie, z czyichś charakterystycznych kwestii też.]

One surely remembers a lot parts and new words, or some cool (cult) phrases, from a performance from 2, 3, 4 years ago, and you still remember this part I you know what

it means, so sometimes you can recall it, say the same part slightly amended and then you learn a language better. It helps a lot, really, because you learn tons of new words. [Zapamiętuje się na pewno dużo kwestii i dużo nowych słów, albo takie kultowe teksty, które nawet przedstawienie było 2, 3, 4 lata temu, a ty i tak pamiętasz tą kwestię i wiesz co znaczy, więc czasem można się odwołać, można powiedzieć tą kwestię trochę przerobioną i też lepiej wtedy się uczy tego języka. To bardzo pomaga, naprawdę, bo poznaje się wtedy mnóstwo nowych słów.]

From these excerpts, we can conclude that engagement with the theatrical performances, including the literary contact necessary for scripting a play, as well as written forms of the language in general, plays a central role in how new speakers conceptualize their learning processes.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have given provided an overview of the youth theatre group Ufa Fisa, which operates in Wilamowice, staging performances in Wymysorys. We argue that the group's activities have had a positive influence on the hitherto negative attitudes about use of Wymysorys (particularly and especially in the public sphere). As in the Hawaiian case (Baker 2018), participation in the group's activities fosters a positive sense of local identity and more general social cohesion. And while some participants may not be actively learning, thanks to their involvement they develop passive competence in Wymysorys, which enriches the linguistic environment in the sense that those who speak and want to speak have more people with whom they can, at the very least, speak and be understood. Finally, activities related to the theatre group are instrumental in the language learning process, both in terms of learning vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar "on paper" as well as cognitive entrenchment through the rehearsal and performance of theatrical productions.

Returning to the question of literature in the process of RLS, Fishman's (1991) emphasis spoken language as a "more basic" form assumes a remaining group of active and competent speakers, who are able to assert themselves in everyday and domestic interactional contexts, especially those relating to child rearing. In the case of Wymysorys this population had perhaps already been lost, despite a living group of elderly speakers. If restoration of sustainable intergenerational transmission of Wymysorys is considered an end goal of the language revitalization, a population that will be able to transmit the language to a subsequent generation needs to attain sufficient proficiency to do so. In this case, first steps in this direction have been taken by the youth who are involved in Ufa Fisa – as part of the group they develop intellectual competence through interaction with literature and other written forms of the language and practical competence through rehearsal and performance of theatrical productions. These experiences translate to cognitive abilities in Wymysorys which will become indispensable for the survival of Wymysorys.

Endnotes

¹ Notably, the projects *Linguistic heritage of Poland 2013-2014*, financed by the National Humanities Program of the Polish Ministry of Science; *Endangered languages. Comprehensive models for research and revitalization 2013-2016* (see Olko, Wicherkiwicz,

and Borges 2016) financed by the Polish Ministry of Science, under agreement 0122/NPRH2/H12/81/2013; *Documentation of Linguistic and Cultural Heritage of Wilamowice* 2014-ongoing, financed by the National Humanities program of the Polish Ministry of Science, and; *Engaged Humanities in Europe* 2016–2019 financed by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 program, under agreement 692199.

- ² See e.g. www.historycampus.org/2019/a-second-look-at-right-wing-poland/ for a brief English-language overview of the rise of far-right politics in Poland. Król has been lobbying for the recognition for some years. On one occasion, Borges had opportunity to address the Polish Parliamentary Commission for National and Ethnic Minorities as a scientific expert in 2016, and was instructed by the commission to specifically provide argumentation against the idea that Wymysorys is a “dialect of German”.
- ³ *The Little Prince* has been translated into hundreds of languages, including other Polish minority languages, e.g. Kashubian *Môli Princ*, translated by Maciej Bandur (ISBN 978-83-9512643-0-3); Mazurian *Mali Princ*, translated by Piotr Szatkowski (ISBN 978-83952831-0-9), Silesian *Mały Princ*, translated by Grzegorz Kulik (ISBN 978-83800853-3-6).
- ⁴ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tęcza_Warsaw

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