



Oliveira, M.; Portela, P. & Santos, L.A. (eds.) (2012)
Radio Evolution: Conference Proceedings
September, 14-16, 2011, Braga, University of Minho: Communication and Society Research Centre
ISBN 978-989-97244-9-5

The German-Speaking Radio in Silesia (Poland)

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Abstract:

Approximately 200 thousand people, belonging to the German minority live in the voivodships Silesia and Opole. The situation of the German media there is of special interest for the research, for the very possibility of radio and TV shows being available in German is a relatively new phenomenon.

In this paper I focus on two radio programmes which are produced by the German minority. My research does not necessarily put on to the radio listeners but furthermore concentrates on how the radio stations represent a region by (the) means of programme planning in order to foster a regional identity.

Keywords: Radio, Silesia, Language Minorities, Regional Identity

The focus of this paper lies on the German-speaking radio stations in Silesia (Poland).

The main questions are which function the stations have with regard to the representation of the "German" minority and how they possibly influence the development of regional identities by the use of German.

My research does not necessarily put on to the radio listeners but rather concentrates on how the radio stations represent a region by (the) means of programme planning in order to foster a regional identity.

I firstly describe the situation of the German-Speaking People in Silesia then I move to the theoretical background and finally I will present some first results of my research.

This article is based on my ongoing research about German-Speaking radios in Poland and Belgium.

Short History of German-Speaking People in Silesia

Today, Silesia is not a national state or a common administrative area. Moreover parts of the "historical" Silesia belong to Poland, the Czech Republic and to Germany.

Due to the place reasons I can provide only a very short excursion into the complicated history of Silesia, but for the context an understanding of the history of the German minority is important.

In very early times the first "German" knights, priests and courtiers settled Silesia (Pikorski, 1994: 13).

In the 18th century Poland was divided into three parts (a Russian, an Austrian and a Prussian part). In all the three parts lived German - speaking people (Lasatowicz, 2008: 147).

In 1918 after the First World War an independent Polish State was developed. There was a plebiscite about the belonging of Silesia in the future in march 1921. Due to the absence of the clear result, Upper Silesia was divided into two parts. The western part came to Germany and the eastern part to Poland (Lasatowicz, 2008: 152).

After the Second World War the ethnical minorities experienced some severe problems in the Polish State. Many people of German origin left Poland or were banished. Theoretically the Polish constitution claimed the equality of all peoples and ethnic groups, however in practise the existence of national minorities in Poland were denied in favour of the „socialistic homogenisation“ (Garwich, 2003: 24).

After the political change in 1989 essential changes in the minority policy of Poland appeared; the homogenisation politics was abandoned (Pikorski, 1994: 13).

Aspects of the constitution from 1997 providing protection of national and ethnic minorities are of an ultimate relevance for my research (Pan, 2006: 370).

In the course of all these political changes in Poland some of the ethnic Germans began to return to their German origin. One could assume that because of the “new” situation of the German minority some “special” mechanisms occurred in the production of identity and in recovering their language. In the following I will describe shortly the situation of the „Germans“ in Silesia.

The “Germans” in Silesia

In Poland there are different regions where people live, who identify with German culture or language. Most of them live in the voivodships [regions] Opole and Silesia. These two regions, that are often called Upper Silesia, are located in the south west of Poland near the Czech and Slovakian borders.

The question who can be called „German“, who belong to this minority and who not is very difficult to clarify. In 2002 a population census in Poland tried to identify who belongs to a national or ethnic minority, but in the case of the „Germans“ there was no clear result.

Official authorities both in Poland and Germany name a different number of „Germans“ in Poland; both sides dispose different criteria to “be counted as German”.

Moreover the national belongings are fluent, so the definite classification is rather impossible and many people prefer to identify themselves as “Silesians” (Sakson, 1994: 113).

Due to the fact, that speaking German language was forbidden after the Second World War and before 1989, and due to the new possibilities to live German identity according to the constitution from 1997; one could assume the appearance of some (new) mechanisms for German identity production, construction and support. So in my research I argue that radio is one of the identity producing agents.

In Upper Silesia, not least due to the decades of the suppression of German language, self-identification as German does not necessarily correlate to the ability to speak German.

The generation born before 1945 often speaks German or a regional German dialect. The people of the “middle” generation, born between 1945 – 1980, often do not speak German, for them German disappeared, due to the prohibition, almost completely from public and private lives of the people. Among younger generations, born after 1980, German language is in use again, however, not learned in family, but in school or in German organisations.

Silesian language/dialect is referred to as mother tongue by some speakers in Upper Silesia. This is a Polish dialect with a lot of loanwords and grammatical similarities of German (Wojcik, 2009: 48).

The consequence of this linguistic peculiarity is that not all „Germans“ do speak German respectively it can also be an indication that many people in Upper Silesia call themselves as Silesians, for the link of the language among these people is lost (Berlinksa, 1994: 172).

These specifics of the German language in the region should be kept in mind, while researching on the radio.

Media Law in Poland

The current Polish constitution provides new approaches to media laws, which is essential in the context of this paper. The media law creates a legal basis for the existence of the non-polish, inclusively German-Speaking Radio Stations (Garwich, 2003: 217).

In 1989 the monopoly of the national broadcasting service was abolished and since 1992 the law of Radio and Television came into force. In this law the duties of the public broadcasting are described. Inter alia, this law provides the national and ethnical minorities with the right to broadcast radio and TV shows in their own minority language. The media law was specified in some points over the years and so the national broadcasting services are obligated to develop minority radio and TV programmes (Pan, 2006: 382).

For the German minority as for all minorities in Poland this law is very important because now they had the official authorisation to produce media content in their own languages.

The German-Speaking Radio Stations

In Poland no German-Speaking radio stations exist, which would produce media content in German only. There are only some radio shows which are broadcasted on several Polish private or public law radio stations. Most of them are broadcasted in regions where a lot people of German origin live. So the biggest number and variety of radio programmes can be listened to in the voivodships Silesia and Opole.

I present here two examples of German-Speaking radio programmes which are produced in Silesia and Opole.

Radio Mittendrin¹

The first one is the radio programme „Präsent“ that is produced by the German-Polish Radio station „Mittendrin“ (the translation of the name is “in the middle of it”) in Raciborz which is located in the region of Silesia. The German-Speaking radio editorial department „Mittendrin“ exists since 1997 and it was established as a wish of the Social-Culture Community of the Germans in the voivodship Silesia.

Up to now, it has been a semi-professional Radio Station that mostly consists of young radio-programme-makers. First of all the radio-broadcast „Die Stimme aus Ratibor“ (The voice of Raciborz) was produced which was mostly a musical request programme in German language. This programme can still be heard once a week on the private Polish-Speaking Radio Station Vanessa. The second transmission in German, „Mittendrin“, existing since 1999, is mainly focussed on young people. This programme is a mixture between entertainment and information.

Since 2006 the whole station is named after that show „Mittendrin“ and broadcasts the whole day through the internet. The station broadcasts a lot of German and Polish music there and the programme is a mixture between German-Speaking and Polish-Speaking Radio programmes.

2010 there was a relaunch in the programme structure and the new mostly German-Speaking programme named „Präsent“ (Present) was established. This programme is broadcasted, besides the internet, every second Monday on Radio Katowice at 10 p.m. Radio Katowice is a radio station under public-law and is receivable in the vovoidship Silesia.

The topics of that programme are mostly information around the German Minority in Silesia; sometimes also regional topics, for example Silesian celebrations or customs. The music is only German popular music.

¹ This part is based on interviews with two members of Radio Mittendrin and on the homepage <http://www.mittendrin.pl/>

Pro Futura²

The second programme which I am dealing with is „Schlesien Aktuell“ (Current Silesia). This programme is produced by the production company „Pro Futura“.

„Schlesien Aktuell“ was firstly broadcasted on Radio Opole in 1998 and addresses German minorities in the voivodships Opole. Radio Opole is a station under public law and receivable in the voivodship Opole.

„Schlesien Aktuell“ is broadcasted at 7.45 p.m. between Monday and Friday and lasts about 15 minutes.

Content of these transmissions are reports, interviews and short features about the German minority.

The programme „Schlesien Aktuell“ is financed by the Institute of Foreign Relations and therefore by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs“ of Germany. Due to the place reasons the dependencies between the contents of the programme and programme’s financing sources cannot be addressed here, although they are part of the ongoing research project.

Interesting, although not in the focus of my research is the programme „Kaffeklatsch“. It is a German-Polish musical request programme on Radio Pak, a Polish Private Station. They broadcast German folk music and reports about the minority like „Die Stimme aus Ratibor“ does it. So, this kind of programmes seem to be popular among the minorities, one can conclude this from their being the most persistent shows on the particular station.

Media and Regional/Minority Identity³

In the following part I would like to present the theoretical background and try to explain the effect of media on regional identities.

Collective identity and in some respect also regional identity is described as a human conception of equality respectively homogeneity with other human beings or groups (Wagner, 1998: 46-70). So, one group delimits itself through certain attributes from others. Interesting is the relation between personal and collective identity; collective identity can only exist if several people project their personal identity on the same collective.⁴ The process of collective identity formation is described by Frank Berge and Alexander Grasse as a “[...] dual process, that on the one hand contains the act of separation, i.e. differentiation and disentanglement and on the other hand the act of assimilation and homogenisation [...] (Berge, 2003: 78)“.

Regional Identity is a special form of collective identity, because in a region on the one hand one also separates from other regions or the main country and on the other hand it could be an act of assimilation with the people who live in the same region and have some attributes in common.

Regional identity is always locally limited, that means, that the region always imposes a territorial boundary. This marking of boundaries has a central meaning in the expression of regional identities (Hepp, 2003:99).

The formation of regional identities could be affected by media; and the border regions with different language population groups present a very specific phenomenon, best suitable for such creation of identities, for the language-region interrelation provides the possibility to observe identity creation, directed towards a specific clearly defined audience. Certainly one cannot start by looking at a one-dimensional effect of media and that media supplies could cause different interpretations and consequently achieve different outcomes. Nevertheless, in the media and communication science it is undoubted that the media has an influence on the construction of identities, both individual and collective. Friedrich Krotz writes in his article “Media as a Resource for the Constitution of Identity”: “If media contribute something to the identity of individuals, they probably don’t do it only for an individual, but also for a whole group of persons, maybe for a whole cohort.” (Krotz, 2003: 27). This is a

² This part is based on interviews with two members of Pro Futura and on the homepage: <http://www.pro-futura.com.pl/>

³ This part is based on an article which was published after the Summer School on “European Union Studies” in Strelna (Russia)

⁴ Ibid.

central aspect, because it is the question of how media messages could be the base material for the formation of collective and regional identities. This can happen because through the media we learn what is coded well or badly in our society (Dorer, 2003: 120). Thus, media give us the orientation necessary to delimit values and standards and to communicate traditions. It delimits the area of our conceivable realities. As a result the human being or even groups take up identification supplies, which become available via the media and use them to as part of their own identity (Christmann, 2003: 154).

Brigitte Hipfl describes in her article "Medial Spaces of Identity" and that media could construct geopolitical areas even through the way they report (Hipfl, 2004: 16). Furthermore, the media brings together different territories with certain behaviours, peoples and cultural practices and they present an area in a different way in comparison to another (*ibid.*).

Therefore, members of a region could have the area they live in delimited by the media and recognize the community as concrete through media representation.

Some first results

As already stated in the introduction, this article is based on an ongoing research and presents here some first results.

My research focus on the radio programmes itself and the producers of the programmes and I want to show how the radio stations represent the minority through their programmes and how they might foster a minority identity. And how they talk about oneself and the others.

I interviewed some producers and experts of the both stations "Radio Mittendrin" and "Pro Futura" and I observed the two programmes "Präsent" and "Schlesien Aktuell".

Here I will present some statements of the interviews and connect them to the theory.

He stations regard themselves as a kind of "megaphone" or spokesman. The editor-in-chief of Radio Mittendrin says to that point:

„The aim is always the same, we are the megaphone of the German minority [...] But not only, because we are here in the Raciborz area, we can't only concentrate on the German minority, but on the whole area who listens to us.“⁵

In this statement you can recognize a deep connection to the region. The radio producers of Radio Mittendrin do not only want to broadcast for the German minority, but they understand themselves more as a regional medium.

A very important aspect in view of the promotion of regional identities is the language. In this case the language is especially remarkable, because of the notable situation of the German language in Poland.

The editorial departments of the both stations always discuss about the language, especially about the voice-over. In the programme "Präsent" the Polish and Silesian parts, for example interviews, are not voiced over. In contrast in the programme "Schlesien Aktuell" all the Polish and Silesian parts are translated into German.

So the editor-in-chief of "Schlesien Aktuell" says:

"There is often a discussion about that, the goal mainly in the beginning was to broadcast a German-Speaking programme and not a German-Polish one. And when it is a German-speaking programme, then the whole programme has to be in German and the originally Polish statements will be translated."

The people from Radio Mittendrin see this point in a little different way.

"Also our goals are, to report about the German language, topics and culture and to get the people interested into that...This is the reason why we won't do it all in German, because it should be German-Polish, so that everybody can get the best out of it..."

⁵ The quotations are originally in German and are translated into English by myself.

These different approaches show, that there are two different conceptions of target group. On the one hand there is "Schlesien Aktuell" that produces the programme only for the people who can understand German and on the other hand there is "Mittendrin" that is more an integrative and, as a region itself, stays multilingual, using Polish, Silesian and German language, leaning to specific language situation in the region.

For the stations it is something very special to broadcast in German, because Germans are a minority, living in a Polish Speaking surrounding, furthermore, for the most Germans in the Region, and also for those, making the broadcasting, German is in most cases not their first language. So it is natural that discussions about the voice-over appear.

Let me come back to the assumption that the broadcasting in German promotes the identity to a great extent.

While listening to the stations one can easily notice that the radio announcers, reporters and speakers do mostly have a kind of regional accent in their language. In this way the language can convey certain regionality. So a cultural belonging can be shown by the language and regional boundaries can be defined, as already shown above. This might provide the development of regional identities.

So a member of the editorial staff of „Schlesien Aktuell“ says:

"We need not be here all brilliant speakers of the mother tongue, who all speak perfect German, because there should be people from this area, who produce the programme for the region."

Still, it is very important that the spoken language is German. Moreover, the stations transmit plenty of local and regional information that would not without the stations (besides some local newspaper) reach the persons who are concerned.

The producers of the programmes would like draw a picture of the minority, as an editorial staff member puts it: *"A picture from the German minority in Silesia should be drawn through the programmes."*

The German minority gets, promoted by the radio, information's of their region and can possibly realize things which maybe relevant for them. The radio stations select thus for their broadcasting the news, which they believe to be especially relevant for the German minority. This constructs to the certain extend the picture of the minority, which is being further on transmitted to the minority itself.

The stations mediate with help of the way of information spreading (regional information from and with people from the region – language/dialect) and the way of communicating a certain view about the collective, in this case for the German minority in Silesia.

A member of the editorial staff of „Schlesien Aktuell“ says about the promotion of identity through the radio programme:

"With every report we support the identity, because we show that it is something beautiful to be different...We are a medium of the German minority."

Through the stations the people can get the awareness for a common collective in order to orientate themselves towards their individual identity.

Boundaries are also described through the way stations transmit their programmes and present themselves. This description of limits is properly relevant for the German minority and makes the stations – in certain way – to a donator of identity.

For a formation of collective regional identities a description of boundaries is always relevant. So the stations provide references to see, who is inside and who is outside.

Silesia is not only "conveyed" by face-to-face contacts but also by media, in this case represented by the radio stations.

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