

***Minority Languages and Cultural Diversity in Europe: Gaelic and Sorbian Perspectives.***  
Konstanze Glaser. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters. 2007. Pp xi + 310.

In her study of two minority languages in danger of extinction, Gaelic of Scotland and Sorbian of Lusatia, Glaser examines the ways in which perception of identity is linked to language in her book *Minority Languages and Cultural Diversity in Europe*. The author chose, to the readers' benefit, to interview leaders of these cultures, whose geographical areas were previously underrepresented in other studies. The interviewees are part of the intellectual and political elite, who include, but are not limited to, members of Gaelic/Sorbian "societies, associations, and/or pressure groups" (p. 7). Consequently, these leaders are likely to shape the story of their people's identity. By including direct quotations from her interviews (in both the language under consideration and an English translation), Glaser fully engages the reader in the complexities of linguistic and cultural shifts.

The book is divided into nine chapters and moves in a logical fashion from general questions on ethnicity, nationhood, and language to the more specific condition of the Gaels and Sorbs. With a firm awareness of her bias as researcher, Glaser is careful to include different perspectives in her analysis, only occasionally adding her own voice to the conversation. The six appendices include maps and English versions of the questionnaires from the interviews, as Glaser spoke with participants in either Gaelic or Sorbian.

In the first chapter (serving as the introduction to the text), Glaser addresses the state of two minority languages that have been historically oppressed, Gaelic and Sorbian. Glaser wants to establish which people are interested in rebuilding these languages and cultures and whether they have the right to do so. These groups historically have used language as a representation of cultural identity, which became an easy way to stand apart in a country where they might otherwise blend in with the majority population. However, boundaries are no longer as definite as they once were, in large part due to globalization. Glaser is interested in the motives behind saving these communities, especially on the part of those who are not proficient in the language, posing the question: "Who is entitled to speak on behalf of the...community, and why?" (p. 4).

The second chapter treats the political history of these two ethno-cultural minorities in Europe in order to understand the formation of their identities. In search of the meaning behind the label of *ethnic group*, Glaser questions representatives from each culture to uncover how these individuals have contributed to the formation of their own status and how their actions compare to those of the group as a whole. Keeping in mind the dangers of nationalism as well as those of assimilation, Glaser provides an excellent historical overview of the development of the nation-state. Glaser draws upon Anthony Smith's (1991) definition of nationalism from *National Identity*, where a population (or at least several key members) labeling itself as a nation, seeks political independence through a unified sense of identity. While the Gaels and the Sorbs both have used language as a way to fight against the dominance of the majority language and culture, Glaser points out that there have been recent developments in the struggles of these two groups to look for a way to work with the majority language and culture rather than against it. Glaser references globalism (the only movement to truly challenge the inherent draw of nationalism), which comes to the forefront as a possible context in which the voice of minority culture can be taken seriously.

Glaser believes that the welcoming and respectful environment of the European Union provides a nice balance against the traditionally held notion that ethnic identity comes from a shared history vulnerable to language loss.

In the third chapter, Glaser provides a sharp and detailed account of the development of linguistic determinism as well as that of linguistic relativism, reflecting on the possibility of thought being influenced by the language(s) in which it is expressed. Her goal in contrasting these two views is to explain why the evolution of language provokes anger and fear in some groups while it does not bother others. Citing Wittgenstein (1980), Sapir (1958, 1991), and Pinker (1994), among others, Glaser finds it probable that people attribute a language to specific part(s) of their personality. In other words, their perspective is shaped by the language they speak. Glaser is equally intrigued by the assimilationist qualities ascribed to the globalization of English, which may actually promote cultural diversity by allowing formerly isolated cultural communities to interact with each other, despite the inevitable struggle of power structures in the endeavor. Glaser rightly points out that focusing on the preservation of a language will not necessarily fend off the influence of another culture, as linguistic dominance is not required to overcome a people. Glaser ends the chapter puzzling over reasons why people hold onto the belief that language loss results in the end of a particular insight into a specific culture.

After mapping out the history of both Gaelic in Scotland (chapter 4) and Sorbian in Lusatia (chapter 5), Glaser returns in the sixth chapter to the possibility of language shaping the world view as understood by these two cultures. Glaser's detailed explanation of the similarities and differences of the struggles of the Gaels and the Sorbs lays the groundwork for understanding how members of the political and intellectual elite, as modern-day representatives of these people, tie together language, culture, nation, and identity. Seeking insight into whether Gaels and Sorbs find that bilingual people think differently than those having minimal (or no) contact with the language, the interviewees with whom Glaser interacted were mostly cautious regarding linguistic determinism and, while open to the advantages of early bilingualism, hesitated to attribute it as a cause of higher intelligence. Glaser hopes that these Gaels and Sorbs will recognize their responsibilities regarding language preservation: language change does not always result in loss and, in many cases, can become advantageous for diversity.

In the face of shifting linguistic and cultural boundaries, Gaels and Sorbs have the choice of viewing their situation as one of evolution or decline. Glaser transitions from the general to the specific when discussing "cultural survival from a minority perspective" (p. 182) in the seventh chapter. No longer self-sufficient in a cultural sense, groups who find themselves reliant upon others must determine the importance of keeping certain traditions alive (e.g., Gaelic storytelling or Sorbian collective singing) at the cost of rejecting revitalizing influences of other cultures (e.g., various forms of English media). The desire to remain authentic to one's community, shared by both Gaels and Sorbs, often requires stale repetitions of cultural acts that no longer reflect the reality of their lives. Innovation within the language is feared, yet it becomes more and more difficult for even highly proficient speakers of the language to fully express themselves in all contexts. This dilemma is echoed within the eighth chapter, where Glaser debates the necessity of proficient language use in order to be a "participant in a Gaelic or Sorbian culture" (p. 300) in light of historical cultural requirements.

Glaser concludes in the ninth and final chapter that while language has become a unifying force among Gaels and Sorbs in the search for cultural identity, it often limits as much as it connects. Activists seeking to preserve the identity of these minority groups should focus on the possible advantages of outsiders joining the cause, rather than on maintaining the so-called purity of the language. According to Glaser, it is only through a favoring of this open perspective that the Gaels and Sorbs will ensure the survival of their ethnic group.

Scholars of any language, and specifically specialists in sociolinguistics and linguistic policy, would benefit from an in-depth study of Glaser's text. The uncertain status of Sorbian and Gaelic in the global village brings a sense of urgency to these interviews, drawing out strong emotions that might be unknown to speakers of languages not currently on the verge of extinction. Glaser makes an important contribution to the debate on globalization, as it is through this movement that Gaelic and Sorbian become most vulnerable and yet also most open to revitalization. It is certain that readers will come away with a better understanding of the intricate ties between identity, language, and culture, as well as the complexity of their preservation.

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