



In the centre for the Lower Sorbian language
WITAJ Language Centre – The language department of the Domowina

Lower Lusatia/Brandenburg Edition

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“Witaj” groni za nas ...

“Witaj – Welcome” means for us ...

... that we accompany all who speak Lower Sorbian and all who wish to learn **Lower Sorbian** as an additional language.

Being multilingual is a European educational objective and our **guiding principle**.

We combine language learning with a variety of experiences in the **bilingual Lusatia region** of Germany. Learners can experience the Lower Sorbian language as a dynamic element of their **identity**. They decide for themselves which **opportunities** they take, whether they participate in the Lower Sorbian culture, realise career objectives in the Lower Sorbian and Slavic language context, or speak Lower Sorbian in the family.

Despite living in places **outside of Lusatia**, some want to maintain their Lower Sorbian native language or learn Lower Sorbian. We connect with them in the **digital world**, share experiences in the real world, and enjoy seeing them, whether they come to visit or **return home** for good.

Our guiding principle is fulfilled if you enjoy speaking the Lower Sorbian language with us and others, you are willing to pass it on to children, you perceive it as a cultural treasure, and you simply **feel welcome** with us.

In this brochure, you will learn what our work for children, young people and adults is all about.

Dr. Beate Brėzan
Head of the WITAJ Language Centre



Rěcny centrum WITAJ – fachowe wótželenje Domowiny

WITAJ Language Centre – The language department of the Domowina

A living language is an expression of a living culture. That is why we do our utmost to preserve the Sorbian language, to pass it on to the next generation, to promote it and to develop it further for the modern world.

With WITAJ – WELCOME, we welcome everyone in Upper and Lower Lusatia who wants to speak Sorbian. We, employees of the WITAJ Language Centre, reach out to the youngest children in the day-care centres, students in and outside school as well as adults with suitable offers. We develop Upper and Lower Sorbian teaching materials, publish journals and accompany bilingual education based on academic findings. With our projects and youth work, we locally support young and old.

The WITAJ Language Centre was founded in 2001 as an independent department of the Domowina – Union of Lusatian Sorbs. It has its headquarters in Bautzen and Cottbus. The WITAJ Language Centre is supported by the Foundation for the Sorbian People, which receives funds from the Federal Republic of Germany, the Free State of Saxony and the State of Brandenburg.

In this brochure, we would like to present the work of our WITAJ Language Centre in Lower Lusatia more in detail. Our efforts in Upper Lusatia are described in an edition for Saxony.

Naše partnerje

Our partners

We cooperate with other Lower Sorbian institutions and maintain contacts with specialist agencies and political bodies. We work particularly closely with the following:

- Domowina Publishing House
- Sorbian Institute e. V.
- Institute for Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig
- Lower Sorbian Education Development Centre Cottbus (ABC)
- School for Lower Sorbian Language and Culture
- German-Sorbian Folk Theatre
- Sorbian National Ensemble
- Wendish Museum Cottbus
- Weekly newspaper “Nowy Casnik” and the Lower Sorbian editorial department of the rbb radio station (Rundfunk Berlin-Brandenburg)
- Regional organisations and associations of the Domowina
- Brandenburg State Ministry of Science, Research and Culture
- Brandenburg State Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
- Brandenburg Technical University Cottbus-Senftenberg (BTU)
- State Education Authority Cottbus
- Brandenburg State Institute for Schools and Teacher Education (LIBRA)

WITAJ Language Centre Cottbus

Teaching
material

Scientific
work

Project
work

The Lower
Sorbian
Dormitory



The Domowina – Union of Lusatian Sorbs is the umbrella organisation of the Sorbian associations in Upper and Lower Lusatia. It was founded in 1912. The Domowina is recognised by state authorities as the political representation of the Sorbs' interests – from the local to the European level. Moreover, the Domowina is a member of the Federal Union of European Nationalities.

Including all affiliated associations and individuals, the Domowina has around 7,500 members. It is committed to the preservation, promotion and spread of the language, culture and traditions of the Sorbian people in the German states of Saxony and Brandenburg. Since 2011 David Statnik has been its chairman.

**Našo wósebne pórucenje:
dwójorěcność**

**Our unique selling point:
Bilingualism**

It's a huge advantage that some of our staff grew up bilingually, speaking both Lower Sorbian and German. Thus, we can directly talk to the young people in their native language and share each other's views on topics such as biculturalism and bilingualism.

We want to convey a Sorbian perspective. We want to show them that the Lower Sorbian culture is as vivid and young as they make and shape it. We want to help them find their Sorbian identity, embrace it and use it for their own future.



“I’m happy that I’m learning a language that not everyone knows. This makes me proud!”

“I heard Sorbian as a child because my grandparents spoke it. Even though I don’t know the language, I am proud that my children speak Sorbian. It transports me back to my childhood. At the same time, I feel like Sorbian has a future, because our children carry the language forward.”



Rěčna situacija serbšćiny

The Sorbian language situation

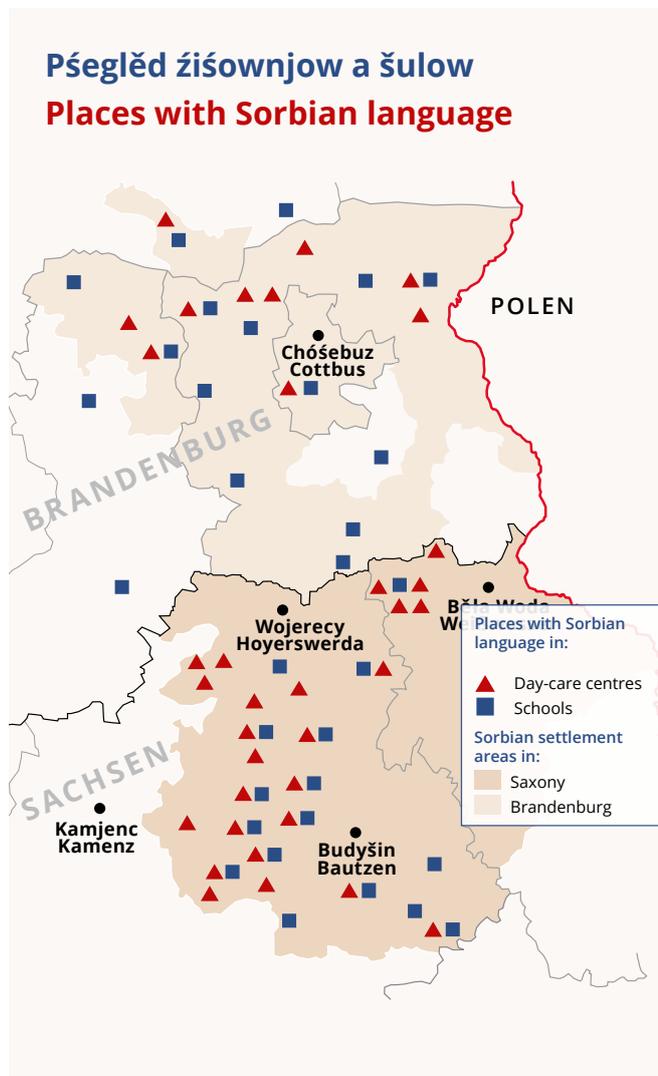
From the edge of the Lusatian hills to the new lake area near Hoyerswerda and the Spreewald, many people speak two languages. This is immediately recognisable from the town and street signs. Here, the Sorbian language characterises the region alongside German.

The linguistic situation of the Sorbs is as diverse and colourful as their culture. In Brandenburg, efforts are being made in day-care centres and schools to revitalise Lower Sorbian, which is actually threatened with extinction. Through extracurricular activities in Lower Lusatia, attempts are being made to create new language spaces that give Lower Sorbian a chance to survive. At the same time, the authentic language of the older native speakers is being recorded in sound and writing for future generations.

In the Upper Lusatia region of Saxony, the linguistic situation is split in two. In the northern and eastern part of the Sorbian settlement area, Sorbian has largely

been forgotten. Efforts are being made to introduce the younger generation to the language of their grandparents and great-grandparents, as well as to get the Germans interested in this small regional language. In the area between Bautzen, Kamenz and Hoyerswerda the situation is vastly different. In many places, the majority of inhabitants are able to speak two languages: Upper Sorbian and German. Here it is natural that young and old speak Upper Sorbian both inside and outside the family.

This linguistic diversity is reflected in the educational realm. The respective circumstances require different educational concepts depending on the language (Upper Sorbian – Lower Sorbian), state policy (Saxony – Brandenburg) and the intensity of language training. It is our task to meet those various requirements. Therefore, we provide offers for all age groups: from day-care centres, primary schools, secondary schools and grammar schools to adult education.



Serby žinsa

The Sorbs today

There is no official number of members of the Sorbian people, as there is no formal commitment or special count in the census. The number of speakers who actively use Sorbian in everyday life is likely to be less than 10,000, the majority of whom are speakers of Upper Sorbian.

A Sorbian educational path can be followed from day-care to university. In Brandenburg around 270 children learn the Lower Sorbian language in day-care centres and around 1,900 students in schools. In Saxony, around 1,200 children are being looked after in crèches and day-care centres and the number of students who take part in Upper Sorbian classes in schools is around 2,900. Institutions for the promotion of the Sorbian language and culture are located in Bautzen and Cottbus. The Sorbs are one of four recognized minorities in Germany.



“In kindergarten, I learn Sorbian. Now I can do something that my parents can’t do ... I like that!”



Witaj w źiŕecem dnjownem pŕebywaniŕcu

Witaj – Welcome to the day-care centre

Everyone has probably heard this before: you should start learning (foreign) languages as early as possible. And the contact with the language should be intensive. This makes language acquisition much easier and more successful. The European Commission has already set a target: every child should learn two foreign languages – a world language and a regional language. In Brandenburg, this would be, for example, Lower Sorbian.

The conditions in Lusatia are ideal for acquiring Sorbian as a second language. It is a deeply rooted language in the region, for some even a forgotten family language. You should pass on your roots to your children. Some of the older generation in the Lower Lusatia still speak Lower Sorbian. In order to preserve the richness of the language and to be able to participate in the culture, many children are taught Lower Sorbian. Moreover, learning this Slavic language is amazingly helpful for communication in neighbouring Poland and the Czech Republic.

But the most important aspect is: In bilingual Lower Lusatia, children from German and Sorbian families

can acquire and improve their language skills already in the day-care centre – supervised by educators trained in the Lower Sorbian language. Therefore, it is neither necessary to attend additional courses nor are there any organisational challenges for the parents. One method by which children in day-care centres learn Lower Sorbian is considered by scholars worldwide to be the most effective: the immersion method.

Serbski wuknuŕ pŕo Witaj-metoŕe

Learning Lower Sorbian with the immersion method

The immersion method for Sorbian has been called “Witaj” (Welcome). In 1998, the Sorbian School Association founded the first Witaj group in its day-care centre in Cottbus-Sielow. Today, eight day-care centres with affiliated crèches in Brandenburg are applying the immersive method either completely or in individual groups. More than 270 children in the crèche and kindergarten experience the Lower Sorbian language while playing, communicating or singing every day. Furthermore, there are four after-school care centres that offer Lower Sorbian language programs that complement the bilingual classes.

The children of the first Witaj groups have already left the Lower Sorbian Grammar School. For the Sorbs in Lower Lusatia, they personify the hope that their language and culture will not disappear but will continue to develop and be alive and well for many generations to come.

Of course, we also support day-care centres that teach the Lower Sorbian language outside the Witaj projects.

Tip: You can find an overview of all day-care centres with Lower Sorbian language education on our website www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.

Metoda imersije

The immersion method

... is the most natural way to acquire a second language. The method does not require any special talent. The educators always speak to the children in the language to be taught. They illustrate what they say with facial expressions and gestures. Whatever they do, they accompany as much as possible with language. The special advantage is that it all happens naturally every day. The children can immerse themselves in the language, without pressure or excessive demands – similar to learning their first language. The little ones decipher the meaning of the words and the language system all by themselves. They memorise and imitate its sound.

Naš přínosk za Witaj

Our contribution to Witaj

Our WITAJ Language Centre does not itself have any day-care centres under its sponsorship, but we support Lower Sorbian language education and training in such educational institutions in three different ways: with didactic materials, language services and scientific work. We also advise and support educational professionals and trainees.

Maskotka za małych

A mascot for the little ones

“Witko” is the mascot of the Witaj project. The perky tot with his red cap and striped shirt is every boy’s and girl’s best friend. Not much smaller than the children themselves, he asks curious questions, tells them something new and is always good for surprises. The special part about all this: the hand puppet can only speak Lower Sorbian. And sometimes you can’t avoid speaking Lower Sorbian with “Witko” because otherwise, he will not understand you.

Tšojeńka, spiwy a eksperimenty za małe wótekšywarje

Stories, songs and experiments for the little explorers

Our bilingual magazine “Lutki” is published quarterly. It is aimed at kindergarten children, their parents and educational professionals. The little ones are happy about stories and songs in Lower Sorbian, colouring

templates, craft ideas and instructions for experiments, all suitable for children. The adults, on the other hand, receive recommendations on how they can support their children in learning or how best to deal with bilingualism in the family. The insert of the “Lutki” magazine offers teachers suggestions on how to promote and teach Lower Sorbian in everyday life at the kindergarten.

Tip: On our website www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de you can read and download all editions of “Lutki” as PDF files.

Rěc spěchujuce materialije

Language support materials

Over the years we have developed tools especially for language teaching and promotion in Witaj groups. They are colourful, linguistically adapted to the needs of the children and their content is based on their experiences.

Tip: You can find an overview of our didactic material for the promotion of the Lower Sorbian language for preschool children on our website www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.



To starješe by dejali wěžeš

What the parents need to know

Our task is to inform parents about the Witaj model. We do this in the form of lectures at parents' evenings. You can also read the brochure "Witaj – Ein Geschenk für Ihr Kind" (Witaj – A present for your child) and find out about the Witaj model by watching the film "Witaj – Zwei Sprachen können ist cool!" (Witaj – Knowing two languages is cool!).

Tip: You can find the brochure and the film on our website www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.

Ducy w žišownjach

On the road in day-care centres

We directly support day-care centres in their language-pedagogical work. For example, a contract employee regularly visits Witaj-groups and offers language-promoting activities. With music and small surprises, the children work on various topics. This way, the boys and girls are hardly aware that they are participating in actual language training.

Pomocniki na woglěže

Visiting assistants

Thanks to many years of support from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the State of Brandenburg, we employ Lower Sorbian speaking assistants, who visit the Witaj groups to play, sing, practice Sorbian customs or just speak the language with the children. In this way, the children as well as the on-site employees receive linguistic stimulation. By doing so, many new didactic materials have been created.

Dalejkubłanja

Advanced training

Teaching a foreign language or working with bilingual children who are to be supported in a minority language requires special pedagogical skills. For this reason, we offer further training for kindergarten teachers. These range thematically from the methodology of language teaching to practical applications and activities promoting the Lower Sorbian culture. In order to stabilize the language skills of our educators, who are usually non-native speakers, we offer three-day subject-specific Lower Sorbian courses.

The WITAJ Language Centre is also engaged in studies on bilingual or Lower Sorbian language education and the education of children at the elementary level. (→ p. 28).





“I like how we learn things in Sorbian that other children learn in German. Therefore, we have two subjects at the same time.”

“I like that it is a different language.”

“Sorbian is an amazing language ... Just the grammar is not my cup of tea.”

A grandfather reports proudly:

“Now I can have a conversation with my granddaughter in Sorbian. And she even understands me!”

“If there is a fly flying around, our children in the day-care centre recognize it and call it “mucha”. The other day, when a fly flew across the room, the almost two-year-old Arthur said: “It’s just narska.” It’s because the teachers in the group often say to the children when a fly appears that it is curious – that means “narska”.”

“Standing at a booth, Fabian explained that there is a “bóson”, and there too! For a long time, he only knew the Sorbian word for stork!”



Witaj – dvě řezy až k abiturje Witaj – Bilingual until the Abitur

The basic idea is simple: the more intensive and lasting the contact with a language, the greater the ability to express oneself in that specific language. That is why it is especially important for the Witaj children to continue speaking Lower Sorbian at school – and to learn to read and write it, too.

In or near places with Witaj groups in the day-care centre, there are also schools with Lower Sorbian instruction – excellent conditions for a seamless transition and close cooperation between day-care centres and primary schools. In turn, these are good preconditions for continuous Lower Sorbian educational path up to secondary school or grammar school. There are two different teaching models for Lower Sorbian: teaching according to the Witaj concept (bilingual lessons) and the traditional foreign language teaching.

Bilingualna wucba Bilingual instruction

In Lower Lusatia, Lower Sorbian is being taught in six elementary schools, one secondary school and one Gymnasium (grammar school) as an addition to the German curriculum or in at least two subjects. These are, for example, art, math, LER (“life planning/ethics/religious studies”) or physical education. At the Lower Sorbian Gymnasium in Cottbus, music and history are currently offered bilingually. These schools follow the same curricula and educational goals as the other public schools in Brandenburg. Therefore, the school-leaving certificates are identical. Lower Sorbian can be chosen as an Abitur (A-Level) examination subject if desired.

Serbšćina ako cuza řeč a ako žěłowy kružk Lower Sorbian in foreign language classes and study-groups

Both in the Lower Sorbian language area as well as in regions where the language is less present, Lower Sorbian is offered as a foreign language subject or as a study-group for up to three lessons weekly in 22 elementary schools, three secondary schools and one grammar school.

Naš přínos k serbskorěcnemu kubljanju w šulach

Our contribution to Lower Sorbian language education in schools

A clear focus of the WITAJ Language Centre is the development of textbooks and various learning materials. Many Lower Sorbian language materials that students and teachers use for learning were developed in the WITAJ Language Centre. We work directly with the Arbeitsstelle für sorbische/wendische Bildungsentwicklung Cottbus ABC (Lower Sorbian Education Development Centre Cottbus) which also creates its own educational materials.

Wšykno za šulu w serbskej rěcy

Everything for school in the Lower Sorbian language

In close cooperation with the schools, our Department for Language and Pedagogy regularly investigates the needs for new teaching materials. From this, we develop our plans, which are presented annually to a committee of experts for review. The committee includes expert advisors at schools and representatives of the Brandenburg Ministry of Education, the Sorbian School Association and other institutions. Implementing their recommendations, we develop about ten different teaching materials in Lower Sorbian every year.

Based on the needs assessment, we develop textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries, digital educational software, posters, geographical maps and games. These are used for teaching students from the first to the twelfth grade at elementary schools, secondary schools and the Lower Sorbian Gymnasium. Different materials are produced for learners of Lower Sorbian as a foreign language or as a second native language.

Nowowuwiša: wucbnice, cytanki a žěłowe zežywki za serbšćinu

Developing new materials: Lower Sorbian textbooks, storybooks and workbooks

Our own production includes all materials for teaching Lower Sorbian as well as other subjects where Lower Sorbian topics are addressed, for example, history and music. The development of such teaching material usually takes place over a long period of time. For the manuscript, we rely on external authors: teachers, scholars, and experts from the field. Often, our specialists are also involved in developing the manuscript. They edit and proofread the texts and coordinate with external photographers, illustrators and designers. Aside from that, they take care of obtaining all publication rights. Our team includes a designer so that we can also develop some of the products in-house until they are ready for printing. The printing and distribution of our teaching materials are the responsibility of the Domowina Publishing House.



Pśełožki: Wucbne srědki za matematiku, wěcnu wědu, stawizny a muziku

Translations: Teaching materials for mathematics, biology, geography and music

For subjects taught in Lower Sorbian, but not explicitly conveying Sorbian content, we rely on prestigious German textbooks recommended for schools by the Brandenburg State Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and the LIBRA. We place orders for licensed translations. These are mainly carried out by (former) teachers of those subjects or by translators. The completed manuscripts are proofread by us. All additional steps – typesetting, printing and distribution – are handled by the Domowina Publishing House.

Słowniki, digitalne póbitowanja a pśedmjat pśesegajuce wucbne srědki
Dictionaries, digital media and interdisciplinary teaching materials

For students taught in a second language, dictionaries are an indispensable tool. In demand are not only German-Lower Sorbian dictionaries but also our vocabulary collections. They are consulted by students, teachers and other users alike.

Modern education also requires new media. We respond to this need by offering teachers materials in digital form – often as a supplement to a textbook. For example, there are CDs with music examples, karaoke

templates, literary texts, task solutions, forms and templates for further editing.

Tip: We offer many materials free of charge on our website www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.

An increasing range of interactive learning software enables students to playfully explore the Lower Sorbian language. A larger project in this context is the online platform “Niedersorbisch – Schritt für Schritt lernen / Rechtschreibung & Grammatik” (“Kšac pó kšacu”, Lower Sorbian – Learning spelling and grammar step by step) (→ p. 30).

Additionally, the WITAJ Language Centre develops numerous learning materials that cover all subjects and levels. These include homework booklets, funny stamps for performance evaluation, posters on Lower Sorbian grammar and history, the letter game „Pismiki z měška” for younger and older children, card games as well as the worksheets and picture cards „Narska liška” and much more.



Naš casopis za žiži:

Plomje – ze zagóritosću za serbščinu

Our magazine for children: Plomje – All fired up about the Lower Sorbian language

Eleven times a year, we publish a magazine for children. It contains fairy tales, stories, comics, interesting facts from all over the world, including from nature and technology, and also songs, recipes, jokes, riddles and pictures to colour. “Plomje” inspires school children between 7 and 14 years. The only Lower Sorbian language magazine in Germany has been published since 1957.

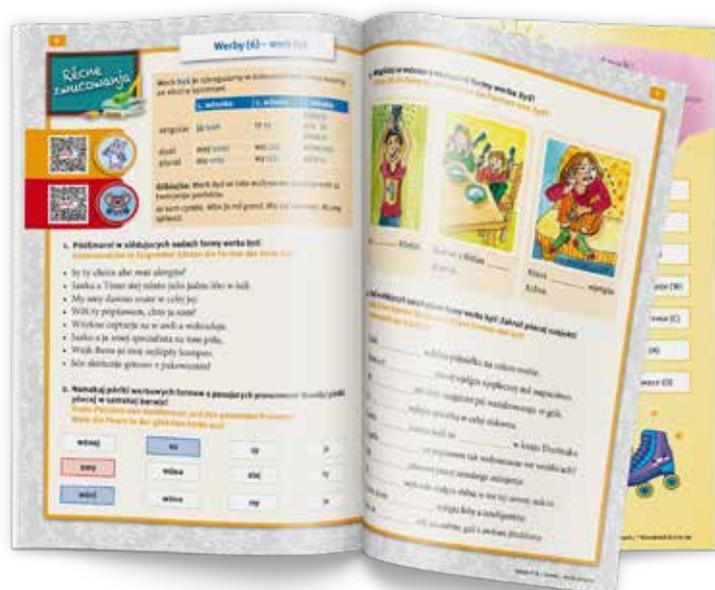
Our editor researches, picks topics, writes the texts together with external authors and has them designed by a select group of illustrators, for each of the monthly editions. In doing so, great care is taken to ensure that beginners as well as older students are equally enthusiastic about reading the magazine. Current topics catch the children’s interest and allow for new experiences. At the same time, the texts follow an approach that accompanies the lessons. The young readers also regularly contribute their own holiday experiences, photos, drawings and stories, which are then published in “Plomje”. The unique feature of this Lower Sorbian magazine is that it addresses the different levels of language ability. For example, to simplify reading the more demanding texts, vocabulary lists or paragraphs in German are added.

Naš casopis za pedagogow: Serbska šula

Our magazine for educators: Serbska šula

“Serbska šula” (Sorbian school) has an even longer history – our quarterly journal has been in existence since 1948. Since 2001, its editorial office has been located in the WITAJ Language Centre in Bautzen. As teachers and other educators in Upper and Lower Lusatia belong to the readership, the journal contains articles in Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian.

“Serbska šula” contains primarily academic and pedagogical articles about Upper and Lower Sorbian education, the Sorbian language in general, history and culture. Also presented are new teaching materials and other products valuable from a pedagogical point of view. Teachers can find specific templates to copy and use for their lessons. Furthermore, “Serbska šula” contains reviews of publications as well as reports on projects with kindergarten and school children or adolescents.



Naše zwenkašulske projekty a projekty w casu wucby – dyrdakojstwa z rěcu

Our extracurricular projects – Adventures with language

It is a concern of the heart for us to offer children interesting experiences with the Lower Sorbian language also after school. Boys and girls from Lower Sorbian speaking families should be able to experience a wide range of entertainment in their native language. At the same time, our projects offer opportunities for children who are learning Lower Sorbian to experience the language in all its vibrancy of outside school.

The Lower Sorbian language is the primary concern of all our projects. Playing, reading, watching films – we would like to excite young as well as older children about the Lower Sorbian language, encourage them to speak it and enjoy the experience.

Witaj-camp

Witaj Camp

“It’s the best project ever!” – these words of a graduate of the Lower Sorbian grammar school in Cottbus say it all. The WITAJ Language Centre organizes a summer camp every year for children who want to improve and expand their Lower Sorbian language skills even during the summer holidays. Since the supervisors only speak Lower Sorbian with the children, they all are in a unique language space. The children do not only listen, but also make an effort to speak Lower Sorbian themselves – even with each other. Our staff, teachers and education students accompany the children daily from early morning to late at night, also on excursions and during playtime. Most of the children come to the language camp every year, so we aim to offer new activities each time. Together we spend a week filled with great experiences and local trips – from the Erlichthof in Rietschen and the Krabatmühle in Schwarzkollm to the famous Strittmatter store in Bohsdorf, there is much to see. One thing is for sure: the Lower Sorbian language and culture and a lot of contact with nature are all included!

Detektiwna góńtwa

Detective Hunt

Several times a year, we offer the “Detective Hunt” project for curious 6th grade students. In the role of detectives, they set out on the trail of various “unsolved cases” that need to be unraveled. Here they can cleverly apply what they have learned from the Sorbian/Wendish lessons and learn new and interesting things. To decipher the clues, the children must read the texts carefully, put together language puzzles correctly, solve letter puzzles, and listen carefully to voice messages. And then the detectives meet people they should talk to in order to get important hints. Of course, at the end of the “Detective Hunt”, a “chief inspector” and his or her assistant want to know what the cases were about and how they were solved – in the Lower Sorbian language. Afterwards, everyone will receive a certificate as a thank you for their achievements in the “Detective Hunt” as well as for their many years of participation in Lower Sorbian lessons.

Through this project, the students are also given the opportunity to get to know Lower Sorbian institutions such as the Lower Sorbian Dormitory, the School for Lower Sorbian language and culture, the editorial office of the Lower Sorbian children's magazine “Plomje” and finally the WITAJ language centre itself.



Cytańske wuběžowanje

Reading competition

During a training session for some of the after-school care workers, the idea of creating a Lower Sorbian reading competition was born. All four WITAJ after-school care centres now participate in this competition. This contest takes place in cooperation with the Wendish Museum in Cottbus. Every student from the second to the fourth grade who participates in Lower Sorbian or bilingual classes is eligible to participate. They choose their texts independently or with the help of an after-school care worker. They read their text at a festive event and a jury has the challenging task of selecting the best reader. The aim of the contest is to motivate the children to get involved with the Lower Sorbian language and its literature. Through reading they get to know books and authors. The children's enthusiasm for this event is evident when they ask long before the usual date when the reading contest will take place again! Thus, the competition supports learning the Lower Sorbian language and perhaps even contributes to strengthening the Lower Sorbian identity of the students.

Zmakanje serbskich familijow

Meeting of Lower Sorbian families

Under the direction of the WITAJ Language Centre, about fifteen Lower Sorbian speaking families have been meeting regularly since January 2017 to get to know each other and to create an additional space to speak the language. Together they carry out activities where only Lower Sorbian is spoken. The parents are delighted that they can discuss questions of bilingual education, expand their vocabulary or get to know the latest material by communicating with each other and with the attending specialist staff. The meetings include many activities, such as hikes, baking bread on sticks, Christmas parties, carnival, a visit at the Cottbus Zoo, or dancing and playing music. In the meantime, an association of Lower Sorbian families has also been established.



Serbski familijowy źeń **Lower Sorbian Family Day**

The annual Lower Sorbian Family Day is a popular event in late summer. Each year it takes place in a different location where children learn the Lower Sorbian language: a kindergarten, an after-school care centre or a school in Lower Lusatia.

In advance, the children from that location prepare a program for everyone that consists of songs, poems, dances and plays in Lower Sorbian. Parents, siblings and grandparents are also warmly invited. As a guest, either the Sorbian National Ensemble, a magician or clown is invited. The children have the opportunity to do handicrafts, paint, play fun competitive games or participate in a dance workshop. At the Serbski kwis, a Lower Sorbian quiz, nice prizes can be won and the whole family can get an introduction to the language in a playful way. In addition, the "Little WITAJ School" provides interested parents with information about the language and a chance to acquire first language skills.

Wumělske wuběžowanje **Art contest**

Whether with drawings, collages or sculptures – there are no limits to the imagination when the children of the Witaj groups in the kindergartens, together with their teachers, participate in the annual art competition.

The focus is on a Lower Sorbian theme such as a legend or a fairy tale, a song, a custom or the Lower Sorbian homeland.

With the help of the educators, the children become familiar with characters such as the Aquarius, the wizard Krabat, the Snake King or the Lutken. They learn interesting facts about St. John's Riding, what the Zampern is all about, or that fires are lit on Easter night and the girls fetch Easter water.

Then it's time to set to work individually or in a group to express this artistically.

All contributions submitted to the WITAJ Language Centre will be shown in a small exhibition and judged by a jury, which also includes students from the Lower Sorbian Grammar School in Cottbus who are interested in art. The best works will be awarded prizes.



Serbske comicowe wuběžowanje **Lower Sorbian comic contest**

Every year, Lower Sorbian students accept the challenge to come up with a short story and present it in words and pictures using the Lower Sorbian language. This comic contest has been held annually since 2004.

Given a largely free choice of topics, Lower Sorbian stories about mythical figures, love, adventures with animals, strange creatures from outer space, exciting holiday experiences and much more are created.

The jury evaluates the comics for creativity of the idea, design, and use of the Lower Sorbian language. The best stories are rewarded and compiled in a comic book, which will be made available to schools with Lower Sorbian or bilingual classes.



Cesćenje angažerowanych młodostnych **Honouring dedicated young people**

Every other year, the WITAJ Language Centre is looking for young people who are particularly active for the Lower Sorbian language: for example, in schools, in working with youth in the villages, in church or even in informal settings. They are nominated by institutions, associations and private individuals.

For their commitment, the young people are honoured with a gift and a certificate from the WITAJ Language Centre.

Žeń serbskich pedagogow a pedagogowkow **Day of the Lower Sorbian Educators**

Every year, all educators and teachers who teach Lower Sorbian in crèches, kindergartens, after-school care centres or schools in general, are invited by the WITAJ Language Centre to a group afternoon. In addition to being a cultural highlight, it is an opportunity to network, exchange experiences, learn about upcoming events and projects, collect teaching materials and to discuss and solve problems.



Šula w zelenem **School in the countryside**

A very popular project among the students is the "Schule im Grünen" (School in the countryside). At the beginning of every school year, fifth graders and their teachers are invited by the WITAJ Language Centre to participate. This project focuses on the intensive usage of the Lower Sorbian language. Since school means learning, the children study selected topics in Lower Sorbian culture and history. In the process, they can actively apply and improve their acquired language knowledge.

To increase the fun, we play games, dance, sing and laugh. Highlighting our close ties to the natural environment, we picked a place in the middle of the Spreewald for the "School in the countryside." There we enjoy activities such as GPS hikes, boat trips and picnics while speaking Lower Sorbian the whole time.

Gódowny projekt w Serbskem muzeju **Christmas project in the Wendish Museum**

Every year a Christmas project is carried out in cooperation with the Wendish Museum Cottbus. Third grade students from all elementary schools where Lower Sorbian is taught are invited to participate. Lower Sorbian topics are presented to the students at three different stations. The main attraction of the project is a visit of the Jänschwalder Christ Child. For the children, the visit is enjoyable, but also "mystical". The Christ Child blesses the students by stroking them gently with a rod and then presents them with small gifts. In return, the children sing previously rehearsed songs in Lower Sorbian. This is followed by a guided tour of the museum as well as a creative music workshop. The participants can learn many interesting facts about the life, history and culture of the Sorbs in Lower Lusatia.

This event is one of the most popular and most visited projects of the WITAJ Language Centre because it impressively combines knowledge and experience in a pre-Christmas atmosphere.







Dolnosorbski internat The Lower Sorbian Dormitory

In Lower Lusatia, the WITAJ Language Centre works with children and adolescents at the Lower Sorbian Dormitory.

“Wótkublanje jo nejmócnjejša broń, kótaruž móžoš wužywaš, aby změnił swět.”

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.”

Due to its linguistic specificity, the catchment area of the Cottbus Lower Sorbian Grammar School includes the city of Cottbus and the surrounding districts. The Lower Sorbian dormitory under the auspices of the WITAJ Language Centre offers students with a long commute a second home. It is centrally located in the immediate vicinity of the Lower Sorbian Grammar School.

In the dormitory, the children and adolescents in our care are exposed to Lower Sorbian as an everyday

language, since bilingualism broadens horizons and tolerance towards others. They learn and deepen their knowledge of the Lower Sorbian language and culture by participating in day-to-day dormitory life. By learning together, cultivating Lower Sorbian customs, and participating in festivals and projects, life in the dormitory is enriched, so that the students quickly feel at home. Life in the dormitory is characterized by a pleasant atmosphere with a clear and safe structure supported by a committed and professional team of educators. The focus is on promoting and expecting lively and respectful interactions, a sense of community, independence, and the free development of each student's individual personality. To ensure the well-being of each child and adolescent, ideas are exchanged between the school, the dormitory and the parents' home. We see ourselves as complementary to the family, whereby close cooperation with the parents is particularly important to us.





“Every year we see how quickly and easily the children pick up a second language. After only a few weeks, they can understand us and begin to repeat Lower Sorbian words.”

“I regularly take part in advanced trainings. By actively acquiring thematic vocabulary, I can improve my Lower Sorbian language skills.”



Dokubłanje Adult education

Serbski wuknuš w kursach abo z nowymi medijami

Learning Lower Sorbian in courses or with new media

By now, there are many parents who want to learn Lower Sorbian – as their children already do in kindergarten or school. For those who are interested, the School for Lower Sorbian Language and Culture (sponsor: City of Cottbus) offers language courses at various levels.

For self-directed learners, our CDs or apps “Serbski lažko – Lower Sorbian easy” with simple phrases for everyday situations are available. Additionally, we recommend various online courses (→ p. 30).

You can also have your Lower Sorbian skills certified by us. You can take an exam at one of the six levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (→ p. 29). Feel free to test your skills beforehand by using our online sample test at

 www.sprachzertifikat-sorbisch.de.

Rěčne póražowanje

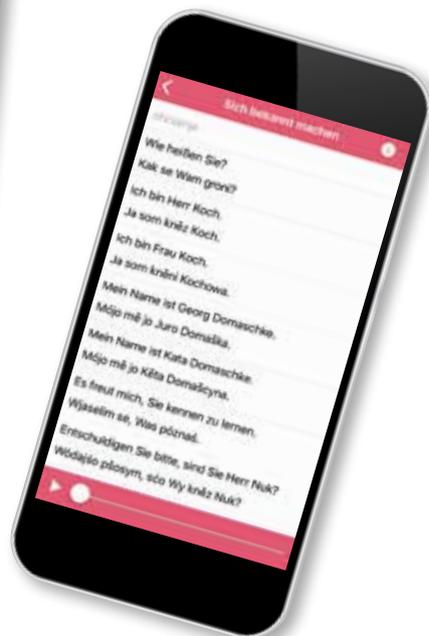
Language advice

Through our daily work with and in the Lower Sorbian language as well as through intensive involvement with Lower Sorbian grammar and technical terms and texts in a wide variety of fields, we have an extensive knowledge of Lower Sorbian, our first or second language. If you have any questions about Lower Sorbian– we will be happy to advise you!

Našo dalejkubłańske pórućenje

Our advanced training offers

We do not only offer training for educators of very young children (→ p. 13). We regularly provide information about our (new) materials for language teaching and promotion for all professionals in Lower Sorbian education.





Wědomnostne žěło Scientific work

Bilingualism and multilingualism are being researched by scholars in many countries. The scientific staff of the WITAJ Language Centre follow the results in this field in order to draw from them for their own studies and to advise professionals in line with the current state of research. The staff accompany the WITAJ project scientifically as well as within the framework of educational policy decision-making bodies and Lower Sorbian committees. The WITAJ staff also publish articles, give lectures at national and international events, offer advanced training and supervise academic theses.

Tip. Results of our studies can be downloaded from our website  www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.

Pšewóžowanje serbskorěcneho wótkubłanja w žišečych dnjownych pšebywanišćach **Support for Lower Sorbian language education in day-care centres**

Witaj is a long-term project. The revitalisation of a language must be thought of in terms of generations. This makes it even more important to carefully monitor the evolution of Witaj, assess the results and further develop the project on a scientific basis. For example, the WITAJ Language Centre has developed quality standards for teaching and promoting the Lower Sorbian language and culture in day-care centres. With the help of a detailed handbook, teachers, managers and providers of day-care can specifically develop and ensure the quality of their work with children up to the age of six.

The quality criteria index is available on our website  www.witaj-sprachzentrum.de.



Pšewóžowanje pšechada wót žišownje do zakładnje šule

Support for the transition from kindergarten to elementary school

The transition from early childhood education to primary school is a significant milestone in a child's life and is a time of change and challenge for children, parents and educators. At the same time, it is a decisive phase for the continuous development of the Sorbian/Wendish language of the children. For this reason, the WITAJ Language Centre accompanies the transition to primary school both conceptually and with practical materials in the kindergartens, after-school care centres and primary schools involved in the process.

Pšewóžowanje serbskorěčnego kubłanja w šulach

Support for Lower Sorbian language education in schools

The contribution of the WITAJ Language Centre to Lower Sorbian language education in schools is manifold: we write scientific publications, evaluate manuscripts and design textbooks and teaching materials.

Certificěrowanje znajobnosćow serbšćiny

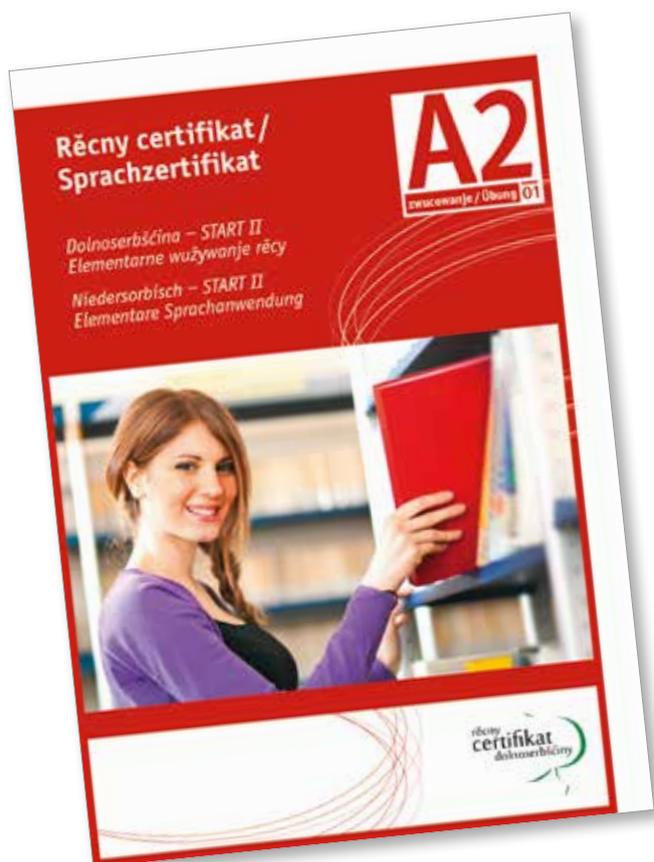
Certification of Lower Sorbian language skills

No matter which European language it is – many learners take advantage of the opportunity to have their language skills certified according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). We arrange for Lower Sorbian language skills to be certified according to the internationally recognised six-level scale of competence. In coordination with the Sorbian Institute e. V. and the Institute for Sorbian Studies at the University of Leipzig, we prepare appropriate sample examinations, evaluation sheets and examination instructions. The authorisation to award the CEFR certificates for Lower Sorbian is the responsibility of the WITAJ Language Centre e (→ p. 27).

Sobužěto w fachowych gremijach

Participation in expert committees

Due to their intensive involvement with the Lower Sorbian language, its development and teaching of future generations, staff members of the WITAJ Language Centre are sought-after experts, among others in working groups of the Brandenburg Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and in the Lower Sorbian Language Commission.





Digitalne medije serbski

Digital media in Lower Sorbian

Lower Sorbian without a presence in the digital media? It could be a disaster. If the Lower Sorbian language wants to be visible, audible and alive today, it has to use modern forms of communication, and at an enormous bandwidth. That is why we spend a lot of energy on expanding our digital offers. Not only do we constantly update our homepage, online materials and communication on Facebook. We have also made it our task to create new media in the Lower Sorbian language – whether for learning, for work or simply for fun.

Naš online-přestajař sotra **Our online translator sotra**

The online translator sotra.app for Lower Sorbian has been available since 2022. It was developed by employees of the WITAJ Language Centre and external experts and is constantly being improved. Sotra (Sorbian Translator) uses Neural Machine Translation (NMT), which is based on machine learning technology. So far, the following translations are available: Lower Sorbian–German/German–Lower Sorbian, Lower Sorbian–Upper Sorbian/Upper Sorbian–Lower Sorbian and Lower Sorbian–Czech/Czech–Lower Sorbian. Sotra also includes an integrated spell checker as well as a chat function and voice output at www.serbski.chat. The translation of subtitles and their dubbing is also possible there. Both Sorbian languages are also available in Microsoft's Bing Translator and the Office suite. A browser extension enables direct translation of selected texts in the browser.

Beginners can have Lower Sorbian texts translated into their native language and vice versa. Advanced language learners can acquire new language knowledge independently through the program. If you translate a lot professionally, you can concentrate on post-editing and proofreading the translated text and no longer have to translate word for word yourself.

The long-term goal is to develop a versatile tool with a wide range of applications for users. In order to constantly improve the quality of the translation, we need as many example sentences as possible – also from external sources.

Naše digitalne produkty za wuknjenje rěcy **Our digital products for language learning**

For school-age students we offer the online platform “Niedersorbisch – Schritt für Schritt lernen/Rechtschreibung & Grammatik” (“Kšac pó kšacu”, Lower Sorbian – Learning spelling and grammar step by step), which we are constantly expanding. This was designed as a learning tool to complement the Lower Sorbian textbooks. Different types of entertaining exercises as well as video and audio clips are supporting a teaching style that focuses on individualized learning.

Adults or self-directed learners of Lower Sorbian can access the language course “Learning Sorbian Online” on www.sorbischlernen.de and a variety of Lower Sorbian courses for German speakers on the online platform Memrise.

Furthermore, “Niedersorbisch leicht – Serbski lažko” (Sorbian easy) is available as a CD and as an Android mobile app. The user hears phrases, questions and answers on topics that are common in everyday life.

Žišece filmy w dolnoserbskej rěcy **Children's films in Lower Sorbian**

Film and television are an essential part of everyday life – usually. However, Lower Sorbian films will probably remain a rarity. To be able to offer Sorbian children a film in their first or second language at least occasionally, the WITAJ Language Centre produces films for children and adolescents. Obviously, the main goal is the entertainment effect of watching the film. Besides, the educational effect of acting and speaking the Lower Sorbian language in the film should not be underestimated, since most of the characters are played by students.

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Being able to express oneself

Seizing opportunities

Experiencing the riches of language together

Learning to speak

Being multilingual

Experiencing identity

FEELING WELCOME

Returning home

Developing language skills

Feeling at home in new places

Passing on languages

Acquiring languages