

Language contact within a Swiss French community on the Northern Black sea coast

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In my paper, I report preliminary results of a study investigating the use of the heritage French in the Swiss community of Shabo, situated on the Northern Black sea coast near Odessa.

The colony of Shabo was found in 1822, when winegrowers from Vaud were invited to colonize the region. It was to become the largest Swiss colony in the world. One thousand people lived there before the Second World War. The Swiss settlers of Shabo managed to maintain their community, develop a successful wine industry and preserve their Swiss culture and language for about 120 years.

First, I will provide some sociolinguistic information about Shabo Swiss community. I will highlight the factors which explain the maintenance of French as mother tongue despite of geographical distance and political circumstances. I will also present the peculiarity of Shabo compared to other Swiss colonies abroad. I social and historical context of the use of this Swiss French variety and the role of language attitudes for its maintenance.

I investigate language contact and change in heritage French, focusing on descendants of 19th- and 20th-century North Germanic settlers. My study is based on two kinds of data. First, I will rely on data of two dialectological surveys conducted in Shabo by Soviet linguists in the 1920's and 1950s. Second, I will use community documents such as diaries and letters. I will therefore adopt a mixed methodology using historical sociolinguistic's approach.

Due to the intense contact with Russian, the dominant language of the region, and to the restricted domains of usage (typically the home), heritage French of Swiss settlers has come to diverge significantly from its homeland variety and has adopted several Russian-like features. Features of Heritage French resulting from the contact with Russian concern phonetics, lexis, morphology and syntax. In phonetics, it leads to the vowel reduction, consonant assimilation, and the disappearance of the opposition /e/ et /ɛ/. In lexis, transfer-based structures and novel creations from Russian. In morphology, we need to mention morphological construction calque from Russian, when Shabo settlers apply to French roots models of morphological derivation typical for Russian.

Although my corpus is limited, my analysis shows the systematic character of the changes in the French spoken by Shabo Swiss settlers. The heritage speakers interviewed demonstrate that Heritage French had an affective and social dimension.

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