

Title: The Sociolinguistics of Variation in Odessan Russian
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Odessan Russian (OdR) is a contact variety of Russian which emerged with massive immigration into the region which is currently Odessa, officially founded in 1794. It was robustly spoken at the beginning of the 20th century by some but not all segments of the population; since World War II it has been in steady decline. OdR is a contact variety, with substrate influences from Yiddish, Ukrainian, and Polish. The impact of contact can be seen in all linguistic levels (phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactic), as well as lexical borrowing from other languages, including French, Greek and Turkic. Today OdR is an endangered dialect with speakers concentrated in Brighton Beach, NY (and perhaps Israel); the variety currently spoken in Odessa differs greatly, due to significant Ukrainian immigration into the city.

Linguistic documentation of Odessan Russian is scant. A dictionary (Dolopchev 1909) is one of the earliest sources; otherwise, most of the documentation consists of literary, fictional texts, a few songs, and some humorous but unreliable pseudo-lexicons. This variety is understudied, with Stepanov (2004) one of the few serious analyses.

The present paper provides an overview of the key linguistic features of OdR which distinguish it from Standard Russian, and then turns to the reconstruction of sociolinguistic variation, based on existing published resources and my own fieldwork in Brighton Beach. I argue that OdR is best understood as reflecting a diglossic situation, with Odessan Russian as the low-prestige variety and Standard Russian the high-prestige variety (Ferguson 1959). Variation in how OdR is represented in differing fictional works can be explained by a combination of social network theory (Milroy 2002) and Sternberg's (1981) model of polylingualism and translation as mimesis. (Poussa 1999 provides similar arguments for the use of literary texts and dialect.)

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