

## Pilot description of phonetic features of Canadian Doukhobor Russian

The proposed presentation focuses on the phonetic characteristics of Doukhobor Russian speech. Doukhobors are a religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural minority who immigrated to Canada from Russia in 1899. Canadian Doukhobor Russian is a unique language spoken by this minority. The language is not found anywhere else in the world and is on the brink of extinction. In some families descending from the original 8,000 Doukhobor settlers, Doukhobor Russian is still maintained, although the numbers of Doukhobor Russian speakers are dwindling, and most fluent speakers are in the age group between 60 and 90 years old. There are about 200-300 fluent speakers of Doukhobor Russian still remaining in Canada, most of them residing in British Columbia, and a few – in Saskatchewan. There are also a few speakers remaining in Saskatchewan. The unique features of Canadian Doukhobor Russian stem from a lexico-grammatical base of 19th century central and southern Russian dialects, combined with loan words from Ukrainian, Canadian English and languages of Transcaucasia: Georgian, Armenian, Azerbaijani (Makarova, 2012). No detailed phonetic descriptions of Doukhobor Russian are available to date. The objective of the study was to outline differences between Doukhobor and Standard Russian at segmental level.

The presentation reports the results of an experimental phonetic (acoustic and auditory) study of segmental quality in the speech of ten speakers of Canadian Doukhobor Russian (4 hours of sound recordings total). The parameters of Canadian Doukhobor Russian are compared with the characteristics of Standard Russian speech (with Praat spectrograms).

Some examples of reported pronunciation differences between Standard and Doukhobor Russian include:

- the use of [ɣ] (voiced velar approximant) instead of standard [g] (voiced velar stop) that has been also reported in earlier research (Schaarschmidt, 2012);
- the use of [x] (voiceless velar fricative) instead of standard [k] in word final position;
- “jakanije”, i.e. the use of [ja] in the plural forms of adjectives and in the imperative forms of verbs;
- “ikanje,” i.e., [i] –coloured pronunciation of word final letter “e” in some words as compared to a stronger reduction of the vowel in standard Russian (more schwa-coloured) ,
- “okanje”, i.e. [o] -coloured pronunciation of some inflectional forms of pronouns.

Implications of the sound characteristics of Doukhobor Russian for the teaching of Russian in BC and for the Doukhobor Russian language maintenance and revitalization are discussed.

## References

- Makarova V. 2012. Saskatchewan Doukhobor Russian: a disappearing language. *The Open Journal of Modern Linguistics* 2 (3), 90-96.
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- Schaarschmidt, 2012 “Russian language history in Canada. Doukhobor internal and external migrations: effects on language development and structure.” In *Russian language studies in North America: New perspectives from Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*, edited by Veronika Makarova, 235-260. London/New York: Anthem Press.

