

Multiple Interference and Putative Innovations in Canadian Doukhobor Russian

Currently, there are about 30,000 persons of Doukhobor descent living in Canada, mainly in the West Kootenay area of the province of British Columbia; roughly 60% still speak Doukhobor Russian (Tarasoff 2002:12; Schaarschmidt 1998:466). Outside British Columbia, there is a large settlement (actually the original settlement dating back to 1899) in the province of Saskatchewan (11,000) and there are Doukhobors living in the province of Alberta (3,000) as well as in California and Oregon (500). Between 1908 and 1913 the Community Doukhobors (appr. one half of the total population) moved from Saskatchewan to British Columbia. Ritual activities among the Doukhobors depend largely on orally transmitted prayers, psalms, and hymns that are based on Russian Church Slavonic; home life in those homes where Russian is still used is conducted in the 19th century South Russian dialect that the Doukhobors brought with them to Canada. A grammatical description of both the ritual language and the dialect must take into account the problem of multiple interference from Ukrainian, Canadian English, and, possibly Standard Russian (Schaarschmidt 2000). Methodologically, it is therefore imperative that any suspected interference phenomenon or innovation in Doukhobor Russian be seen in the light of the structure of the dialect before migration to Canada in 1899. Since the Doukhobors maintained an essentially oral tradition until the 1930s, there is little direct evidence for specific changes or innovations occurring in the first migrant generation. For this reason, the comparative method is the best way of mapping this period in the history of Doukhobor Russian (Bouquiaux & Thomas 1992). In addition, the transcribed versions of the psalms provide considerable evidence for identifying features that are not characteristic of the South Russian dialect.

References

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