

ABSTRACT

Title: « Nous n'avons plus de langue pour nos fêtes de famille. » Le changement de langue dans une famille alsacienne.

English title: "We no longer have a language for our family gatherings." Language shift in an Alsatian family.

Author: Katharina Vajta

University/Department/Year: Göteborg University (Sweden)/Department of Romance Languages: French & Italian Section/2003.

For many centuries in Alsace a Germanic dialect, Alsatian, has been spoken, with German as the written form. In the 17th century, when the province came under French rule, French became a prestige language, and after the revolution it would also grow to be a symbol for the republic and the French nation. Historically, the position of Alsatian has been strong, not least during the 19th and 20th century conflicts between France and Germany. Each peace treaty between the countries has meant a new nationality and a different official language for this border region. But since 1945, when Alsace once again became French, the transition to French has accelerated and the use of the Germanic dialect is now diminishing rapidly.

In the historical section of the dissertation there is an account of the importance of ideological factors in the language question and how French has come to dominate in the linguistic market-place. In order to illustrate these developments an empirical study of language and language choice among seventeen informants within a family was carried out in Alsace. In this family Alsatian has been passed down from the older generation A to the four children of the middle generation B, but only one of these passed on in turn both Alsatian and German to the younger generation C. Consequently we have found the *locus* of language shift to be within the other dialect-speaking informants in generation B. The parents who did not pass on Alsatian to their children claim a French linguistic identity and a mixed cultural identity, while in those who did choose to teach the dialect the Germanic component is clearly marked in both linguistic and cultural aspects.

The informants were required to record a series of Germanic place and personal names on tape. A number of markers which are realised quite differently with a French pronunciation were subsequently selected out. Analysis of these markers indicates that they can be separated into two types: on the one hand, those which are resistant to the influence of French, on the other, those which are not. Among the non-resistant markers considerable variation was observed in the pronunciation of the informants. A phonological poly-system was developed according to which certain informants were able to choose which norms for pronunciation they wished to use, depending not only on linguistic identity, but also on speech situation. Those who pronounced the markers in the French way were also those who for various reasons had not taught the dialect to their children. Within this family we found changes in pronunciation which reflect a more general process of language shift.

Keywords: Alsatian, Alsace, sociolinguistics, bilingualism, language shift, linguistic market-place, linguistic attitudes, nationality, nationalism, citizenship, identity, minority.

Göteborg University (Sweden)
Department of Romance Languages: French & Italian Section