

CONTACT-INDUCED LEVELLING OF CASE IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE OF ODESSA

In this work, we aim to characterize a contact-induced change of a peculiar type of linguistic variety, the Russian language of Odessa (OdR). This variety was born as a *lingua franca*, and was passed on later to successive generations of speakers as a native language, slightly decomplexified with respect to the standard. [1, 2]

We address the levelling of morphological case marking of sentence arguments in OdR, namely, the extension of genitive marking to non-quantified non-negated inanimate objects (*Knigu redaktiroval taki ploxo znajuščij odesskogo jazyka* (gn) ‘The book was redacted by a person who hardly knew the language of Odessa’; *Ja zabył u vas vzjat’ ètix gvozdikov* (gn) ‘I forgot to take those nails’) and non-existential inanimate subjects (*Pust’ vas ne volnuet ètix glupostej* (gn) ‘let those silly things not worry you’; *Èto uže sovsem drugix veščej* (gn) ‘those are completely different things’), instead of the normative accusative and nominative.

We describe genitivation in OdR, evaluate its sources (language-internal rules and possible substrata), and explain the similarities and differences with respect to other genitivation processes in other Slavic varieties: (i) Polish and Czech ‘facultative animacy’ (*Widzę ananasa i ogórek* ‘I see a pineapple and a cucumber’) [3]; (ii) Dialectal Ukrainian Russian ‘genitive of temporal object’ (*Daj karandaša narisovat’* ‘give me the pencil to draw’) [4]; (iii) Dialectal North Russian ‘subjectual genitive’ (*K oseni studentov naedet* ‘in autumn many students will come’) [5].

We characterize the nature of this phenomenon as a special type of contact-induced change, fitting Dahl’s [6] definition of suboptimal transmission. Thus, OdR slightly reduced certain “irregularities”, differing from the radical simplification of pidgin / creoles, the hybridization of mixed languages / code switching, and the ‘compensatory complexification’ of natural diachronic development of “old” languages. [7]

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