

Mapping Linguistic Variation in French-speaking Switzerland

In Switzerland, French is spoken by approximately 18% of the population, on an area that is called *Suisse romande* or *Romandie*. Despite the size of the surface where it is spoken (9,508 km², compared with the 551,500 km² in France), Swiss French exhibits a lot of variation. It is common practice to distinguish Swiss French varieties based on the canton where they are spoken. Thus, Fribourg French is said to be different from Valais French, which is different from Geneva French or Neuchâtel French, etc. Of course, some people will claim that they can make finer distinctions between speakers from different places within the same canton (Neuchâtel people from the lake side do not have the same accent as Neuchâtel people from the heights), and sometimes even between speakers from the same district (Métral 1977 stated that it was possible to distinguish speakers from different villages in the Sion district, each village being located 10 km from one another).

Since a few years, I have been participating in different projects aiming at gathering material to empirically test such assumptions (cf. the spoken Swiss-French corpus [OFROM](#), the accent game identification platform [tonaccent.ch](#) and the crowdsourcing surveys “[Français de nos Régions](#)”). In this talk, I will present some of the most important results of these ongoing projects. First, I will comment a series of maps based on surveys that were conceived to assess the vitality of well-known Swiss lexical features (names of meals; of numbers; of animals and plants, domestic-related lexicon, etc.), grammatical features (word order, argument structure, verb tenses) and pronunciation features (vowel quality, final-word consonant pronunciation). I will shed new light on the place they occupy within French-speaking Europe by trying to answer questions such as: are such features specific to Swiss French? Are they equally distributed among the different French-speaking cantons? What is the role of speakers’ age on the distribution of the variants? Next, I will comment the results of some experiments where participants were asked to recognize different accents, within Europe and within Switzerland. Within Europe, I will show that Swiss accents are rather well distinguished from other French accents, but that they can be conflated with Alsatian or Belgian accents. Within Switzerland, I will show that there is a lot of confusion between the accents of the French varieties spoken in the Jurassic Arc (Neuchâtel, Bernese Jura and Jura), as well as between Valais and Fribourg, while Geneva and Vaud accents are generally well distinguished one the other. I will also make some remarks regarding the presence of some specific shibboleths in the stimuli on the capacity to identify Swiss French accents.