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Autor: Wey, Alain
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speaking Switzerland for the use of more standard language in public life and in particular in German-language national television and radio programmes were buried without a trace this spring – by the mainly German-speaking parliament.

Listening to old and new

Dialects can be heard and experienced at the National Library's "Sapperlot! Swiss Dialects" exhibition. Visitors are put in the mood with old and new quotations from the realms of media and culture, which cover the wall opposite the entrance. Visitors can walk over a giant map of Switzerland above which audio units dangle from the ceiling. The 20 historical and 20 current recordings that are played from them are explained in the exhibition guides handed out at the entrance – in all the national languages, of course. The more recent sound recordings show that the intention is "not just to bathe in nostalgia", as the curator Peter Erismann put it. There are also examples of current ethnolects and sociolects. For example, a discussion among young people from Zurich on the 2009 "youth word of the year": "sbeschtwosjehetsgits" (the best there's ever been).

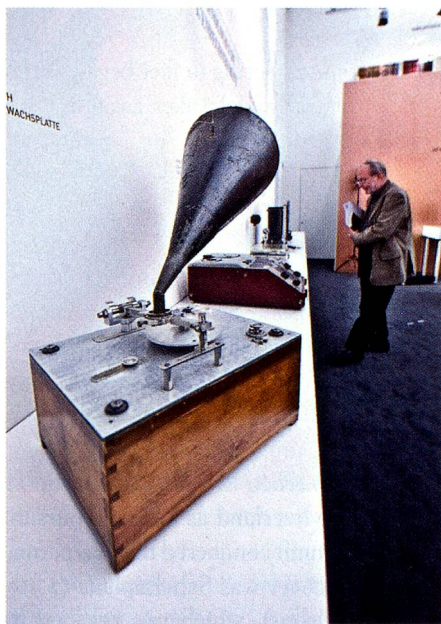
Recordings of songs and literature in dialect as well as spoken word art show that dialect is more relevant culturally than ever before. While dialect in music and literature was restricted to folk and the rural idyll until a few decades ago, it is today also used in pop, rock and rap, and verse is composed on topics such as politics, sport and society at *poetry slams*.

The "Voices of Switzerland 2012" project is also an important part of the exhibition. Visitors to the exhibition can record their own voices in two small sound studios and listen to the recordings of previous visitors. The University of Zurich's phonogram archive is collecting this new material for research. This project goes beyond the exhibition itself. Anyone can participate online (see box). The phonogram archive, which is heavily involved in the production of the exhibition, is also exhibiting historical and modern recording devices in the main hall.

Unusual lexicons

The exhibition also presents the four national dictionaries "Schweizerisches Idiotikon", "Glossaire des patois de la Suisse Romande", "Dicziunari Rumantsch Grischun" and "Vocabolario dei dialetti

della Svizzera italiana". They all date back to between 1860 and 1910, and none has yet been completed. The "Idiotikon" (from the Greek *idios*: idiosyncratic) is set to be completed in 2022 with its 17th volume. All published articles can already be accessed at www.idiotikon.ch. This work also reveals the meaning of the title of the exhibition,



Sound recordings were made on wax discs with the "Vienna Phonograph" from 1909

"Sapperlot". This euphemistic form of the religious term "Sakramänt" is an "expression of affirmation, annoyance, astonishment or admiration". It is quite possibly a word that might slip out when confronted with the bewildering diversity of Swiss dialects.

MIRIAM HUTTER is a volunteer at "Swiss Review"

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

When: from now until 25 August 2012, Mon-Fri 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Sat 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Where: Swiss National Library, Hallwylstrasse 15, 3003 Berne; Entry: free; www.nb.admin.ch/sapperlot

PARTICIPATION

It is also possible to take part in the "Voices of Switzerland 2012" project remotely. You can record your own dialect online and listen to recordings that have already been collected.

www.stimmen.uzh.ch (German)

www.voix.uzh.ch (French)

www.voci.uzh.ch (Italian)

www.vuschs.uzh.ch (Romansh)

RESEARCH

At <http://dialects.from.ch>, 10 terms, which have to be translated from High German into dialect, are used to determine the region from which speakers come.

PUBLICATION

The panorama of Swiss dialects that was published at the national exhibition in Zurich in 1939 under the title "Stimmen der Heimat" is now available in a new edition: "Stimmen der Schweiz", Verlag Huber, Frauenfeld 2012. Two audio CDs + phonetic transcription. ISBN 978-3-280-1559-5

The reflections of a "Romand"

I'm unwinding on the terrace of a pub in Brienz. At the table opposite, the guests are discussing their respective weeks on this Friday evening in complete tranquillity. As a "Romand", a French-speaking Swiss, straddling the divide between the two linguistic regions, I have difficulty understanding the distinctive dialect of the Bernese Oberland. I recall my school days when we were taught High German. The language of Goethe. What an extraordinary act of altruism on the part of the education system in French-speaking Switzerland. But what is the point of force-feeding these poor pupils with grammar destined to be forgotten? Dative, genitive and accusative – now I'm the one pointing the finger of accusation. Sleep-inducing declinations. And not for one moment amid this mass of German grammar did a teacher draw parallels with Swiss German. That's, the height of absurdity for the Swiss. It's so simple. Abend – Abig, zusammen – zäme, ich habe – i ha. Or "i bi z'Brienz gsi!": I've been to Brienz. I left this inoculation with written German behind at the school desk at the age of 18. I'm now twice that age and nothing has changed. There seems to be a lethargy hanging over cantonal education – "Why change? We've always done it this way!" Young French-speaking and German-speaking Swiss converse in English. That's globalisation for you. But the solution seems so simple, oral and progressive. I often hear critics of teaching Swiss German at school say they would not know which cantonal dialect to use. That's just an good excuse. The canton of Zurich has a population of over 1.2 million. The answer appears very obvious. A real linguistic injustice is essentially being done as my neighbours in the Oberland have learned French at school – the language currently spoken in the Romandie region – while the French-speaking Swiss have not learned the language used east of the Sarine river. And whose fault is that? ALAIN WEY