

# The Sociopragmatic Values of Pennsylvania German ("Dutch"): Changes Across Time, Place and Anabaptist Sect

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## 1.0 Introduction

This paper addresses the issues involved in language shift in Beachy Mennonite communities in South Carolina. The home language of all of the speakers in this study was a Midwestern variety of Pennsylvania German, which they learned in their childhoods in Ohio or Indiana. They refer to this language as 'Dutch', or 'Deutsch', which are the terms I will use for the rest of this presentation. The language they are shifting to is North American English (henceforth simply 'English'), the language of the larger society. External factors clearly motivate this shift; these communities, unlike the communities in which they were raised, are neither comprised solely of Dutch speakers, nor are they part of a chain of Dutch-speaking communities across a larger area. Instead, these South Carolina communities are relatively isolated enclaves, and although the majority of the members speak Dutch, recent arrivals include English monolinguals.

However, although these external factors have certainly sealed the fate of Dutch in the next generation in these communities, the shift from Dutch to English that is underway for the first generation of settlers in these communities is only indirectly caused by external factors. The direct catalyst of language shift for these speakers are the changes in the social value of Dutch, and this paper offers an account of this sociopragmatic change.

Language shift, described in terms of the Markedness Model (Myers-Scotton 1993) is the change in the unmarked choice of community language. In immigrant communities in the United States, this often occurs across generations, with the older generation speaking the immigrant language, and the younger generation speaking English. The motivation for the shift in the unmarked choice is often based on the shift of the sociopragmatic value of the immigrant language; when the identity it indexes is not important to the speakers, it ceases to be the unmarked choice. It is commonplace for this shift in sociopragmatic value to occur across generations.

However, a more detailed look at language shift also includes assessing what the unmarked choice is in different domains within the community, and what the values are which contribute to these markedness values.

In this study I analyze the ways in which bilingual speakers of Pennsylvania German and English talk about their languages to discover changes in the sociopragmatic values attached to these two codes, which in turn motivate the unmarked choices in different domains. These data are augmented by my own observations and the research of other scholars of Pennsylvania German.

### *1.1 Anabaptist sects: a brief overview*

Before I begin to discuss specific language values for these speakers, I will offer a brief picture of North American Anabaptist communities. There is an entire continuum of Anabaptist sects containing Amish and Mennonite orders. A word that is commonly used within these groups to discuss different practices is "Plain"; modest traditional dress, simple lifestyles, and lack of technology are all considered "Plain", an adjective which holds a strong positive value for these groups. The two Anabaptist sects I will be discussing in this paper are Old Order Amish and Beachy Mennonites. (Although these groups, especially the Old Order Amish, contain many sub-groups, they can also be

viewed as two distinct categories.) The speakers I will be discussing grew up in Old Order Amish communities, but live as adults in Beachy Mennonite communities.

The Old Order Amish are readily identifiable by their modest and usually dark-colored dress, hair coverings for women, chin beards for men, and horse and buggy transportation. In the Midwest counties where these speakers were raised, Dutch is alive and well. They grew up surrounded by other speakers of Dutch not only at home and at church, but at the public schools they attended, at most stores where they shopped, and often in their places of employment.

The Beachy Mennonite communities where these speakers now reside look and sound very different. Although the girls and women wear a similar style of Plain dress and hair coverings, their dresses are light colored; the boys' and men's style of dress is often indistinguishable from non-Mennonites. These communities use all forms of technology, including the cars, telephones, and electricity that were not part of their upbringing. And Dutch is rarely heard in public.

## 2.0 Sociopragmatic values of Dutch and English

In this paper, I show that during the lifetime of these bilinguals, Dutch and English have changed places almost completely in terms of the values attached to the different codes and the unmarked choice in different types of interactions.

In Table 1, the sociopragmatic values of Dutch and English in the childhood Old Order Amish communities of these speakers are compared with the values associated with these two languages in their current Beachy Mennonite communities. As you can see, values once attached to Dutch are now attached to English, and vice versa.

**Table 1: Values of Dutch and English in childhood OOA and current Beachy communities**

Value	Old Order Amish communities (childhood)	Beachy Mennonite community (current)
Plainness	Dutch	(not a value of either code)
Mainstream (non-Plain)	English	English
Easy to learn	Dutch	English
Hard to learn/spoken poorly	English	Dutch
Important for getting ahead in life	(not a value of either code)	English

Going hand in hand with these changes in values are changes in the unmarked choice in different domains of interaction. In Table 2, the domains of use that follow from these values are given for each community. Here, we can see a clear shift to English in all domains of interaction.

**Table 2: Domains of language use**

Domain	Old Order Amish community (childhood)	Beachy Mennonite community (current)
Interactions with non-Plain	English	English
Interactions with Plain strangers	Dutch	English
Interactions with Plain friends, family, etc.	Dutch	mostly English
Interactions in the Church	Dutch	mostly English
Interactions in the home	Dutch	Dutch and English

### 2.1 History

There are a number of events which occurred in the history of the South Carolina settlements which provide the backdrop for language shift. First, a change in sect occurred after the original founders of these communities had been in South Carolina for about a year. They had great difficulties maintaining their Amish lifestyles. One problem was that the entire infrastructure necessary for maintaining a lifestyle devoid of modern technology (e.g., blacksmiths, buggy-makers, etc.) not available. A second problem was that the heat of a much harsher summer than they were used to in the Midwest made traveling with horses and buggies and cooling their food without electricity very impractical, if not impossible. Thus, they decided, as a community, to become Beachy Mennonites, because the doctrine for this sect allowed the use of technology. A quote describing this situation is given in (1).

(1) *Wo mer runner gezoge sin nau, mer ware Amish, un es hat en Amish Gemee پروiert starte da, but de Sun war zu hot far die Geils an Buggy ziehe, un...es war net viel drivers gewese, taxis hatte, wenn es schunst zu weit is far fahre mit de Geil an Buggy. Es ware net so Leit da, weescht, un es war hart far de Mannsleit far jobs griege mit juscht en Geil an Buggy far transportation, an hat juscht net ausgeschafft far Amisch Leit, so ham mer vehicle griegt, cars griegt. So, ware mer net meh Amish, so ham mer nau ein Beachy Gmee gehatt.*

‘When we moved down, we were Amish, and we tried to start an Amish community here, but the sun was too hot for the horses to pull the wagons, and there weren’t many drivers that had taxis, for when it was too far to drive a horse and buggy. There weren’t that kind of people here, you know, and it was hard for the men to get jobs with just a horse and buggy for transportation, and it just didn’t work out for being Amish, so we got vehicles, cars. We were weren’t Amish anymore, so we had a Beachy community.’ (F3)

A second external factor for language shift has been the presence of non-Dutch speaking members of the Beachy community. Once the community had converted to the Beachy Mennonite faith, it grew through the arrival of other Mennonites whose families came from communities outside of the Midwest or Pennsylvania, the strongholds of Dutch: Georgia, Virginia, or Texas. In the communities of origin for some of these families, Dutch had not been the language of everyday life, and they had passive, if any, knowledge of this language. Thus, even within the religious community there are monolingual speakers of English.

Third, because in South Carolina there are no Dutch speakers outside of their small religious community, the employment of these Beachy Mennonites necessarily involves them in regular and pervasive contact with monolingual English speakers.

Finally, the language of religious services in Mennonite communities is traditionally English, thus the services in these communities were also conducted in English.

Obviously, these factors demand a greater use of English by the members of these Beachy Mennonite communities. However, they do not require a switch in the language spoken in the home or the switch to English as the preferred language; this switch is motivated by the change in values for Dutch and English that were brought about by increased contact with English.

## 2.1 *The Old Order Amish in the Midwest*

First, I will give descriptions of the beliefs and practices of the Plain in their Midwestern communities. Overwhelmingly, the portrayal of these communities by these speakers is that Dutch is the language of everyday interactions. It is unquestionably the unmarked choice among members of the religious community, as attested by many of the speakers I interviewed and shown in examples (2) and (3). These attestations are supported by research in these communities (Johnson-Weiner 1998; Keiser 2000; Van Ness 1996, 1999, 2000).

(2) *'S is really gut far sie wenn mer zrick in Ohio gehn. Because 's is alles Deitsch dart.*  
'It [Dutch] is really good for when we go back to Ohio. Because it's all Dutch there.' (F2)

(3) I: *Haste daheim immer Deitsch geschwätzt?* 'Did you always speak Dutch at home?'  
S: *...Oh ja, es is all es mer geschwätzt ham.* 'Oh yeah, it's all we ever spoke' (F1)

Further, Dutch indexes a Plain identity, and is especially associated with the Old Order Amish, as illustrated by the quote in (4).

(4) *Meist die Amische kenne schwetzte, aber die Mennonites sin some wegkomme davon*  
'Most of the Amish can speak [Dutch], but some of the Mennonites are coming away from it.' (M7)

The association of Dutch with Amish identity is also shown in the quote in (5), in which the speaker remarks on an unusual situation – one in which an Amish person cannot speak Dutch – and this is remarkable because of the dissonance it creates in the Midwestern Old Order Amish Community.

(5) *'S is en Mädle es sei parents warn in California, sie hat die Amische gejoint... oh, ich guess 's wär four, five years ago, sie hat geheirat, sie hat mei cousin geheirat, sie hen a baby. Sie kann noch net arrig viel Deitsch, very little...sie kann net juscht zu viel Deitsch noch, net nah so viel es duh kann! Un sie, sie is Amisch! Du dähtst's net wischte, wenn Du sie sehe, es sie net immer gewest wär. Es is amazing.*

'It was a girl whose parents were in California, she joined the Amish...oh, I guess it was four or five years ago, she married, she married my cousin, they have a baby. She still can't speak Dutch, very little....she can't speak very much Dutch yet, not nearly as much as you can! And she's Amish! But to look at her, you'd never know that she hadn't always been there. It's amazing.' (F2)

This story illustrates the connection between being Amish and speaking Dutch; although this person has converted to the Amish faith, and convincingly looks the part, she still lacks a critical feature of Plainness: speaking Dutch.

English, on the other hand, was the code spoken with non-Plain outsiders, who are, significantly, often called 'the English'. For members of the Midwestern Old Order Amish communities, English was the unmarked choice for use with outsiders, and although occasionally some non-Plain people did speak Dutch, it was not expected of them, as shown by the description in (6) of one speaker's experiences at school.

- (6) *Sell war ein all-Amische Schul, but die teacher war net. Teacher war ein certified teacher, war net Amish teacher. An sie hat net kenne Deitsch.*  
 ‘It was an all-Amish school, but the teacher was not. The teacher was a certified teacher, not an Amish teacher. And she couldn’t speak Dutch.’ (F6)

As would be expected from the first language in a community, Dutch is viewed as a language that is learned easily and naturally. These speakers' discussions of language learning from their childhoods revolve around learning English; learning Dutch was unremarkable since it was the language of the home, as shown in (7).

- (7) *Sie prowiere mache as in recess, while du in die Schul gehst, musst du Englisch schwätze, an weescht, sell really helft dich. Because wenn sie net dähte, die Kinner duhn strictly zu Deitsch de ganze Zeit, un sie lerne ‘s net recht. Deitsch hen sie schun cause sie hen’s gelernt vunne child, so war sei erscht language.*  
 ‘They [the teachers] try to do that in recess, while you’re in school, you have to speak English, and it really helps you. Because if they didn’t do that, the children would speak strictly Dutch the whole time and they wouldn’t learn it [English] right. Dutch they have because they learned it as children, so it’s the first language.’ (F2)

Further, English is viewed as a language which is often spoken poorly by community members. This is illustrated in examples (8) and (9), in which speakers of Dutch are described as ‘not saying everything right’, ‘having a ‘Dutch accent’ and ‘mixing up words’ when they speak English.

- (8) *Ich duht sag some Leit (unintelligible) deet alles net grad recht sage, weescht. Mer hawwe unser deitsche accent, weescht was ich meen?*  
 ‘I’d say that some people (unintelligible) don’t exactly say everything right [in English], you know...We have our Dutch accent, you know what I mean?’ (F4)
- (9) *Amische kinner duh... wenn sie zuerst deitsch lerne and net Englisch kenne, (sie als mol) ihre phrases uufmixe. Wenn sie vielleicht en Englisch phrase vielleicht die Warde rummixe but es is because vun ihre German.*  
 ‘Amish children...if they learn Dutch first and don’t know English, they mix up their phrases, maybe an English phrase with the words mixed up, it’s because of their German.’ (F7)

These assessments of language proficiency motivate the use of Dutch with Plain speakers, even those they don’t know. It is assumed that, if they look Plain, they speak Dutch natively and English imperfectly, so Dutch is the obvious choice for ingroup interactions.

## 2.2 Practices and beliefs in the Beachy Mennonite communities of South Carolina

In the Beachy Mennonite communities these speakers live in as adults, there is clearly a different pattern of language acquisition, use, and attitudes. Although all of these speakers had the reputation of being good speakers of Dutch, many admitted that they do not speak it regularly in the home or with others in the community, and my observations support this. In (10), the speaker admits that she now prefers to speak English; in (11), the speaker portrays the entire community as one in which little Dutch is spoken, and in (12), the speaker indicates that English has become her automatic unmarked choice.

- (10) *Een Zeit hab ich als viel besser Deitsch schwätze kenne as Englisch, un nau, wenn ich mei preference hab, ich starte juscht Englisch schwätze.*  
 ‘At one time I could speak much better Dutch than English, but now, if I have my preference, I just start speaking English.’ (F4)

- (11) *Mir sin wegkomme. Ich kann noch gut deitsch schwätzen, but mei Kinner sin an weg komme vun deitsch schwätze. Da in South Carolina, da in A---- sin net zu viel Deitsch mit die Mennonites.*  
 ‘We’ve come away [from Dutch]. I can still speak it well, but my children have come away from speaking Dutch. Here in South Carolina, here in A---- there’s not much Dutch among the Mennonites.’ (F6)
- (12) *Mei Mann an ich schaffe druber in Aiken mit all die Englisch Leit, er duht net oft deitsch schwetze. Es kommt juscht so automatic, mer sin net aware davon.*  
 ‘My husband and I work over in A— with all the English people, he doesn’t often speak Dutch. It [English] just comes automatically, we’re not aware of it.’ (F3)

From these descriptions, we can see that Dutch is no longer the unmarked choice in the home or in the religious community, even with others who speak Dutch. To some extent, it is a marked choice because of the presence of English monolinguals (that is, their own children who do not speak Dutch well, and adults who have moved to South Carolina from non-Dutch speaking communities). It is also used less and less at home, or among close friends and family members. My observations of interactions in the homes of the research participants and at community events support this.

### 2.2.1 Dutch is no longer part of being Plain

The most significant shift in values, however, is in the switch from seeing the ability to speak Dutch as an essential part of being Plain to the separation of Dutch proficiency from Plainness. In the Midwestern communities in which these speakers were raised, speaking Dutch indexed Plainness, and inability to speak Dutch was associated with being non-Plain. In South Carolina, however, this symbolic link has been broken. These speakers acknowledge that it is possible to be Plain and not speak Dutch. In their contact with Mennonites from outside the Midwest enclaves, they have encountered people who they consider Plain that do not speak Dutch. Unlike the woman mentioned in example (5) above, who was an oddity in the strongly Dutch enclave in Ohio, the people they have met in South Carolina (and other tertiary communities) are not misfits, but representatives of entire Plain communities which are not Dutch-speaking. This is exemplified by the quote in (13) which, appropriately enough, was said to me in English.

- (13) *And we have one family that moved here from Montezuma, Georgia, and over there, they’re, they’re actually as far as Plain people are concerned, they’d probably be Plainier than we are. But they speak all English.* (M5)

This recognition of the separation of language and religious identity has led to another shift in behavior: they no longer consider Dutch the unmarked choice for addressing strangers who appear to be Amish or Mennonite.

- (14) *As a rule, schwetzte mer English zu sie, ’cause some vunne, es, you know, wear coverings, kenne net deitsch, so (du will) net rude sei. I have already been very embarassed, I’ll, ich hab schwetzt zu (unintelligible), and I can’t, I can’t understand you. So I usually talk English, you know they understand that.*  
 ‘As a rule, we speak English to them [strangers], because some of them, that, you know, wear coverings, can’t speak Dutch, so you don’t want to be rude. I have already been very embarrassed, I’ll, I have talked to (unintelligible) and [they responded] "I can’t, I can’t understand you". So I usually talk English, you know they understand that.’ (F5)

Since Dutch is no longer considered a necessary part of their ingroup identity, it is no longer important to teach it to their children and maintain it as a home language. This separation of Dutch from their religious affiliation as Anabaptists is directly expressed in (15).

(15) *I appreciate it more than I did at one time...I speak Dutch, and I'm glad I have it, I don't regret it. I want my children -- but it's not a religion to me. It not that, it's just, I think it's convenient, I think it's something we learned that I'd like for them to know just because it's uhm, it's nice to know it, but it's not a religion.* (F5)

### 2.2.2 English is learned easily and well, Dutch is hard to learn

Unsurprisingly, given this lack of use, we see that the attitudes about learning Dutch and English and the proficiency of the community members have also changed; in fact, they are now the exact opposite of those claimed for the Midwestern Old Order Amish communities. Dutch is seen as something that people are less likely to learn, and if they don't learn it young, they never will.

(16) *Mer ham welle unser Kinner lerne deitsch schwetzte, so mer ham sie zuerst deitsch gelarnt, es sie Englisch, Englisch gehabt ham, so es sie es for sure grieje...but nau, es is pretty well alles Englisch schwetzt.*

'We wanted that our children learned to speak Dutch, so we first taught them Dutch, before they learned English, so they would learn it for sure...but now, it's pretty well all English spoken.' (F2)

English, as one speaker says, *sie picke es easy uuf* 'they pick it up easily' (F11). Dutch, like English in the Old Order Amish communities, is often reported to be spoken badly, while there is no discussion of the quality of the English spoken. It is a given that it is spoken well, just as speaking Dutch well was a given in the Midwestern communities of their childhoods. Examples of the feeling about the Dutch spoken in these communities are given in (17) and (18).

(17) *Mir duhn a lot Englisch neimixe in unsere Deitsch, 'We mix a lot of English in our Dutch.'* (M2)

(18) (About the Dutch of the speakers in her community) *But, an wenn die deitsch schwaetze, schwaetze sie net deitsch. Wie mer duhn. Sie sin so weg komme von deitsch schwetzte. Sie duhn some deitsche Worte nehme, aber es is, es is meh English.*

'But, when they speak Dutch, they don't speak Dutch. The way we do. They have come away from speaking Dutch. They take some Dutch words, but it's, it's more English.'

### 2.2.3 English is important for getting ahead in life

In addition, there is a new reason to learn a language: English is the language one needs to get ahead in life. This was not a motivation for language learning (or anything else) in the more conservative communities. Men were expected to be farmers, carpenters or factory workers and women were expected to be homemakers; no one attended school beyond the 10<sup>th</sup> grade because it was not necessary for their goals, and neither were good English skills. This has changed; a wider variety of career options are deemed appropriate, and speaking English well is seen as necessary for any type of employment. The quote in (19) and (20) illustrate the attitude that it is important to learn English for the members of this Beachy Mennonite community. To some extent, as shown in the quote in (21), this value is even imposed on the Old Order Amish Midwestern communities in which many children do not learn English until they go to school.

(19) (Said about the South Carolina Mennonite school): *De teachers kennte ao Deitsch schwätze, but, you know, far proper English misse sie sie English lerne in die Schul, sie misse English schwätze.*

'The teachers can speak Dutch too, but you know, to learn proper English they have to learn it in school, they have to speak English.' (F2)

(20) *Englisch selle sie lerne, because de world is Englisch, you know, de Welt is English, an...du muscht Englisch use-e so sie, you know, du lernscht Englisch.*  
'They should learn English because the world is English, you know, the world is English, and...you have to use English.' (F2)

(21): (Said of the children in Old Order Amish communities) *They go to school and they can't speak much English and they're sort of handicapped.* (F5)

### 3.0 Conclusion

Although the pervasiveness of English has surely played a role in the inter-generational shift from Dutch to English in these communities, the shift to English by the first generation of settlers in these Mennonite communities in South Carolina has been brought about by the change in the symbolic values of Dutch and English. Because the link between Plainness and speaking Dutch has been broken, language shift need not wait for the next generation. Once the attitude that status as a member of a Plain community was not contingent upon speaking Dutch became accepted in the community, even adult speakers with a lifetime pattern of speaking Dutch in the home and church settings began to shift to English.

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