

# Stable Bilingualism and Phonological (Non)Convergence in Pennsylvania German

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## 1 Introduction

In this paper we examine the limits of phonological convergence in a situation of long-term, stable bilingualism. Specifically, we will look at the effects of contact between the variety of Pennsylvania German spoken by Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite sectarians originating in Lancaster County, PA, and American English. We begin with a brief overview of the sociolinguistic situation of these speakers, highlighting how it differs from that of so-called nonsectarian Pennsylvania Germans, who historically comprised the large majority of Pennsylvania German speakers. We then proceed to sketch how external differences in the nature of Pennsylvania German-English bilingual contact are reflected linguistically, particularly in the area of phonology. Evidence from the stable bilingual situation of the sectarians suggests that to Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century who lived in rural areas of the southeastern and central parts of the state. A tiny fraction of the estimated 81,000 original immigrants were members of conservative Anabaptist groups, most notably Mennonites and their spiritual cousins, the Amish. Today, the language is only actively used among the most conservative of these groups, the Old Order Amish (ca. 200,000) and Old Order Mennonites (ca. 10,000; cf. Kraybill and Hostetter 2001), groups that are familiar for their distinctive lifestyle apart from the social mainstream. Among nonsectarian Pennsylvania Germans (mainly of Lutheran and German Reformed affiliation), the language has not been acquired by large numbers of children since the mid-twentieth century. It is safe to say that within the next twenty to thirty years, members of the Old Order groups will be the only speakers of Pennsylvania German. Owing to their large average family size (6 to 7 children per family) and high retention rates (ca. 80%+ of children born to Old Order parents choose to become members as adults), there could be over 1 million speakers of Pennsylvania German by the turn of the next century. Geographically, most Old Order sectarians, that is, active Pennsylvania German speakers, no longer live in southeastern Pennsylvania. Eastern Ohio, for example, has surpassed Lancaster County as the largest settlement, followed by northern Indiana.

Contrary to popular belief, and reinforced by the folk linguistic stereotype in the U.S. that to speak a language other than English natively and actively precludes native fluency in English, essentially all Old Order sectarians are balanced bilinguals. Although Pennsylvania German is the preferred medium of intragroup oral communication, sectarians make frequent use of English in both informal and formal domains. English is the exclusive medium of instruction in Old Order parochial schools (which most sectarian children now attend), and virtually all Old Order families have at least one close relative who is a member of another church, with whom English is often spoken. And especially in the larger settlements, notably northern Indiana, many or most Amish men and sizable numbers of women work for non-Amish employers in settings where English is primary medium. In terms of literacy, English is used almost exclusively. Virtually all intra- and inter-group correspondence, from shopping lists to personal diaries to newspaper articles, are written in English. Sectarians have only passive knowledge of an archaic form of Standard German for liturgical purposes (Bible readings, prayers, hymns in church). Almost never, except for a word here and there in letters, do sectarians commit Pennsylvania

German to paper or read it. Pennsylvania German is for the majority of sectarian speakers an exclusively oral medium.

The bilingual situation of most nonsectarians, in the past and today, has differed from that of the sectarians. Among them, maintenance of Pennsylvania German has correlated with knowledge of English at odds with that of their English-monolingual neighbors, a stigmatized variety known in Pennsylvania as “Dutchified English.” This is English with obvious phonetic and phonological interferences from Pennsylvania German (“a ‘Dutchy’ accent”) and loan translations. While popular stereotypes have grossly overstated the “Dutchy” character of nonsectarian Pennsylvania German English (few speakers actually talk like the tea towels and other tourist shlock widely available in southeastern Pennsylvania), that many of these Pennsylvania Germans *do* speak “imperfect” English to some degree is true and is discussed below.

The paradox of the Pennsylvania German sociolinguistic situation is that those speakers who are apparently most distant from the English-dominant social mainstream, the members of the separatist Old Order groups, are in fact the “better” bilinguals (demonstrated for phonology in Raith 1981). Again, despite their countercultural socio-religious identity, they are effectively ambilingual in both Pennsylvania German and English. For many nonsectarian Pennsylvania German speakers, on the other hand, maintenance of the language has implied imperfect mastery of English. Theirs is a situation of minority-language maintenance not by choice, but by the inertia that results from clearly identifiable demographic factors, notably residence and employment in the rural areas of southeastern Pennsylvania they grew up in, limited formal education, and endogamy. Those socially and geographically more mobile Pennsylvania Germans who have over the last two and a half centuries moved into towns and cities, entered the professions, and married non-Pennsylvania German speakers have—since the very genesis of the language in the eighteenth century—been much less likely to transmit Pennsylvania German to their children.

## 2 Linguistic consequences of stable bilingualism among sectarian Pennsylvania Germans

Turning now to sectarian Pennsylvania Germans, among whom the language is thriving side-by-side with English in a range of substantial domains, we find intriguing—but nonetheless limited—evidence of contact-induced change, either from sectarian varieties Pennsylvania German to their English or vice versa. As indicated above, the English of sectarians essentially follows native monolingual norms: if one were to hear an average sectarian speak English only, native judges would likely never guess that that speaker had native knowledge of any language other than English. So Pennsylvania German-to-English transfer (e.g., the Dutchified English of nonsectarians) is largely absent among Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites. Let us now consider evidence of change in the opposite direction, that is, convergence of Pennsylvania German toward English, in the following domains: phonology, morphology, syntax, and the lexicon.

Such evidence is in fact quite limited. Taking phonology first (though revisiting this in more detail below), the “German” character of the sound patterns of German has been largely unaffected by contact with English. To take one outstanding example, Pennsylvania German, like most if not all European dialects of German, has maintained the rule whereby underlyingly voiced obstruents occurring in syllable-final position are devoiced. Compare the alternation in (1) below.

### (1) Final devoicing in Pennsylvania German

[t] ≈ [d]      [rɔnt] ‘round’ ≈ [rɔndə] ‘rounder’

In the area of derivational morphology, we see a similar absence of English influence on Pennsylvania German. For example, in nominal compounds in German, if the first noun takes an irregular plural, the noun will appear in that form in the compound; this contrasts with English compounding, where usually the first element is uninflected. This is nicely illustrated in examples of Pennsylvania German nouns calqued from English, two of which are given in (2).

(2) Redderschduhl (\*Raadschduhl) < ‘wheelchair’, lit. ‘wheels + chair’

Bicherschdohr (\*Buchschohr) < ‘bookstore’, lit. ‘books + store’

So what about syntax? Overall, like phonology and morphology, Pennsylvania German syntax has historically shown little influence of contact from English. Most outstandingly, Pennsylvania German remains an underlying Object-Verb language with a rule of verb-second (V2), that is, a rule according to which a finite verb may be moved to the Spec, CP in matrix clauses. The finite verb remains in situ in subordinate clauses. Compare examples in (3).

(3) Ich hab 's Buch gelese

I have the book read

‘I read the book’

Hoscht du gwisst, as ich 's Buch gelese hab?

have you known that I the book read have

‘Did you know that I read the book?’

However, the syntax of Pennsylvania German sectarians does reveal the effects of contact with, that is, convergence toward English, but crucially ONLY in those areas where the syntax-semantics interface is most direct. In the area of verbal morphosyntax, sectarian Pennsylvania German has developed a system that basically matches that of English in terms of tense (past–present–future vs. “German” past–nonpast) and aspect (progressive–nonprogressive). Specifically, this has involved: for tense, the development of a non-modal future auxiliary (*tseele, figgere* < verbs of counting); and for aspect, the expansion of a native, but historically limited progressive construction (*am* ‘at the’ + infinitive) to match largely the distribution of the progressive in English (Louden 1988). In nominal morphosyntax, clear evidence of English influence is seen in the loss of the dative case, that is, its merger with the historical accusative to yield a two-case system (Subjective-Objective) for object pronouns; the historical two-case system (Common-Dative) for full nouns has been reduced to a single (Common) case. Further evidence of convergence is shown by the fact that the Objective case for pronouns is the default case, that is, the case assigned in the absence of a case assigner (Louden 1988).

This limited evidence of contact-induced syntactic change in the Pennsylvania German of Old Order sectarians is consistent with a broader pattern of lexical isomorphism between their language and American English. To a remarkable degree, the two languages have become intertranslatable, a process that is observable in apparent time by comparing modern sectarian Pennsylvania German with its (recent) historical antecedents. The most significant external factor underlying this semantic convergence of Pennsylvania German in the direction of English is the increase in sectarian verbal interaction with English monolinguals over approximately the past half-century, itself the result of increasing numbers of sectarian men pursuing non-agriculture-related livelihoods (e.g., factory work in the case of northern Indiana mentioned above). This demographic trend is known among students of Amish society as the “lunch pail threat” (Kraybill 2001).

It is beyond the scope of the present talk to discuss these patterns of semanto-syntactic convergence in greater detail, but it should be mentioned that situations similar to that of sectarian Pennsylvania German-English bilinguals have been discussed in the literature. These are situations of robust, stable bi- or multilingualism in which, roughly speaking, the phonological and morphological shapes of words in the various languages in contact remain distinct, but their semantics, and to some extent the syntactic structures that underlie their linkage to one another, show clear evidence of convergence. The best known of these contact situations is the case of Kupwar described by Gumperz and Wilson (1971). To this we could also add another example from India discussed by Nadkarni (1975), as well as the convergence situations in Fort Chipewyan, Alberta (Scollon and Scollon 1979) and Rimella, Piedmont, Italy (Bauen 1978).

Why phonology and morphology should be less susceptible than semantics (and syntax) to convergence in these situations may have to do with the “communicative salience” (Louden 1988) of these domains of language structure. For average speakers, what is salient in the sense of

metalinguistic awareness is words and how they are pronounced. Speaking specifically of the Kupwar situation, Richard Hudson (1980:48) notes the following:

... [R]egarding the different types of linguistic items and their relations to society, ... *syntax* [emerges] as the marker of cohesion in society, with individuals trying to eliminate alternatives in syntax from their individual language ... *Pronunciation* reflects the permanent social group with which the speaker identifies. This results in a tendency for individuals to suppress alternatives, but in contrast to the tendency with syntax, different groups suppress different alternatives in order to distinguish themselves from each other ...

Although it is not clear to what extent Hudson understands syntax to be autonomous from semantics, the point is nonetheless made that the sound structures of words are crucial in maintaining sociolinguistic boundaries in situations of long-term, intense bilingualism. In what follows, however, we look more closely at phonology in the Pennsylvania German situation and indicate that perhaps not all subparts of this domain of structure are equally resistant to convergence.

### 3 PG and AE phonology of Old Order Sectarians in Lancaster county

#### 3.1 Phonemic inventory of PG consonants and positional distribution

In our discussion of phonological convergence and nonconvergence we will focus on consonants. The consonantal inventory of Pennsylvania German in Lancaster County is given in (4). Ferré (1994:19) notes that /t/ is relatively rare in Pennsylvania German and primarily found in English loans like *teacher*. However, /t/ is also found in *Tee* (Midwestern and Lancaster PG) and two Lancaster PG words, *Tann* ‘tower’ (cf. dialectal German *Torn*, German *Turm*), and *Tutt* ‘bag’ (cf. German *Tüte*, English dialectal *toot*). The rarity of /t/ is attributable to the Old High German sound shift, which resulted in the affrication of initial /t/ but did not affect initial /p/ and /k/ in the Palatine dialects from which Pennsylvania German primarily originated. The voicing contrast is also not well developed for fricatives. Palatal voiced /j/ is an approximant equivalent to American English [j]. The only true voiced fricative in Lancaster PG is labiodental [v].

(4) Phonemic inventory of PG consonants (adapted from Ferré 1994:19, Reed 1947)

Consonants	bilabial	labio-dental	alveolar	palatal	velar
sonorants					
nasals	m		n		ŋ
liquids			l/r		
glide				j	
fricatives					
voiced		v			
unvoiced		f	s	ʃ	x/h
stops					
fortis	p		(t)		k
lenis	b		d		g
affricates			ds	ɟʃ	

Voiced and voiceless stops contrast only in initial position where voiceless stops are aspirated and voiced stops are phonetically voiceless. In medial position only voiced stops are found. In final position, only voiceless stops are found. The voiceless fricatives are found in all positions. The voiced fricative /v/ is found initially and medially, but not in final position. Affricates are lenis and voiceless. The positional distribution of obstruents in PG is given in (10).

(5) Distribution of PG obstruents (see Ferré 1994, Reed 1947, Louden 1997)

Manner	Initial	Medial	Final
stop	[p <sup>h</sup> t <sup>h</sup> k <sup>h</sup> ]	[b d g]	[p t k]
	[b̥ d̥ ɡ̥]		
fricative	[f s ʃ h]	[f s ʃ ç x]	[f s ʃ ç x]
	[v]	[v]	
affricate	[dʒ, dʒʰ]	[dʒ, dʒʰ]	[dʒ, dʒʰ]

### 3.2 Influence of PG on AE

In a study of phonological interference in the American English of Pennsylvania German speakers in Lancaster County, Raith (1981) examined the speech of sectarians and nonsectarians by having them read aloud a short text written in American English. He found that indicators of interference could be organized into the implicational hierarchy in (6). Thus, all the speakers in the study who substituted [w] for [v] in *very* exhibited all the other indices of phonological interference from Pennsylvania German that are listed below  $w \rightarrow v$  in (6). Surprisingly (given the impression, discussed above, that nonsectarians are closer to the social mainstream than the Old Orders), interference was most common among nonsectarians, who without exception regularly devoiced final /b d g/ when speaking English. On the other hand, interference was almost entirely absent in the American English of the six Old Order Amish informants, four of whom never devoiced final /b d g/. The other two Amish informants varied in their production of word-final voiceless stops.

(6) Implicational scale of phonological interference PG  $\rightarrow$  AE in Lancaster County

(Raith 1981: 42-43)

least pervasive	$\theta \rightarrow s / \# \_$	<i>thin</i>
	$r \rightarrow \emptyset / \_ \#$	<i>floor</i>
	$v \rightarrow w$	<i>very</i>
	$ou \rightarrow o:$	<i>joke</i>
	$z \rightarrow s$	<i>bells, houses</i>
	$w \rightarrow v$	<i>want</i>
	$v \rightarrow f / \_ \#$	<i>leave</i>
	$dʒ \rightarrow tʃ$	<i>jug</i>
	$eɪ \rightarrow e:$	<i>teenager</i>
	$\Lambda \rightarrow \text{ɒ}$	<i>jug</i>
	$r \rightarrow \emptyset / \_ s \#$	<i>teenagers</i>
most pervasive	$b, d, g \rightarrow p t k / \_ \#$	<i>jug</i>

It is clear from (6) that a potential source of interference in the American English speech of Pennsylvania German bilinguals stems from the fact that Pennsylvania German uses contrastive voicing only word-initially for stops. Among fricatives, contrastive voicing is present only in the labiodentals /v/ and /f/. Affricates in Pennsylvania German are not contrastively voiced. Thus, Pennsylvania German speakers may substitute /s/ for AE /z/ and /tʃ/ for /dʒ/ in all positions, and there is a strong tendency to replace word-final voiced obstruents in AE with their voiceless equivalents. However, Raith's work shows that Old Order sectarians in Lancaster County have successfully acquired contrastive voicing for American English obstruents in all positions. We now examine to what extent this successful acquisition of American English voicing patterns by Pennsylvania German bilinguals is accompanied by the convergence of Pennsylvania German phonology with that of American English.

### 3.3 Allophonic convergence of Sectarian Pennsylvania German with English

Given the lack of interference in the American English spoken by Old Order Amish in Lancaster County, it is perhaps unsurprising that phonetic convergence with English is evident in their Pennsylvania German. Historically, PG /r/ was realized as an apical tap. PG /l/ was realized as a “bright” [l] in all positions. In present-day Pennsylvania German in Lancaster County, /r/ and /l/ have the same phonetic realizations as in American English. As shown in (7), Sectarian PG /r/ is realized as an approximant [ɹ]. PG /l/ now has two contextual variants, a bright [l] in syllable onsets and a velarized [ɫ] in codas when following the vowels [a, o, u].

(7) Convergence of PG and AE *r* and *l* in Lancaster (Louden 1988:128)

PG		AE
recht	[ɹɛçt] ‘right’	wrecked [ɹɛkt]
Heisli	[haisli] ‘outhouse’	nicely [naisli]
Kall	[kaɫ] ‘guy’	call [kaɫ]

### 3.4 Preservation of Pennsylvania German phonemic alternations

Since Old Orders are able to produce to speak American English without final devoicing, one might expect a lack of final devoicing in their Pennsylvania German as well. However, sectarians maintain final devoicing and the resulting voicing alternations in Pennsylvania German as illustrated in (8). In addition to the strictly voicing alternations in (8) that result from final devoicing, sectarian Pennsylvania German also preserves alternations between /v/ ~ /p/, /j/ ~ /k/ and Ø ~ k as in (9). Historically, the alternations in (9) were phonetically well-motivated. Etymological /b/ and /g/ lenited in medial position and underwent devoicing in final position.

(8) Final devoicing in PG among OOA (Louden 1997: 80)

robbe	[ɹɔbə] ‘pick inf’	~	rob	[ɹɔp] ‘pick 1sg’
Bilder	[bɪldə] ‘pictures’	~	Bild	[bɪlt] ‘picture’
hocke	[hɔgə] ‘sit inf’	~	hock	[hɔk] ‘sit 1sg’

(9) /v/ ~ /p/, /j/ ~ /k/, Ø ~ k alternations

schreiwe	[ʃɹai:və] ‘write inf’	~	schreib	[ʃɹaɪp]
bariye	[baɪjə] ‘mountains’	~	barig	[baɪk] ‘mountain’
daage	[da:ə] ‘days’	~	daag	[da:k] ‘day’

It appears that convergence is suppressed where it would involve contrastive sounds even in positions where the contrast is neutralized. This is particularly evident in the alternations in (8). The distribution of contrastive voicing among Pennsylvania German stops is limited to initial position. In medial position, stops are always voiced when between sonorants. Stops are always voiceless in word-final position. Therefore the alternations in (8) result from a neutralization of voicing contrasts for stops in medial and final positions in Pennsylvania German.

### 3.5 Loan phonology

Pennsylvania German contains a significant number of English loanwords (ca. 20% of the total lexicon). The distinction between integration and inclusion of loanword plays a role in interpreting phonological convergence in Pennsylvania German. Integration occurs when a borrowing is phonologically adapted to the recipient language. Inclusion describes a borrowing which retains its phonological shape in the recipient language and is not phonologically adapted to the recipient language. Historically, words borrowed from English were phonologically integrated into Pennsylvania German. This can be clearly seen in the pronunciation of older loanwords, including proper nouns, listed in (10). As previously discussed, stops in Pennsylvania German are always voiced medially between sonorants and voiceless in final position. Moreover, the consonantal inventory of Pennsylvania German does not include the interdental fricative [θ]. Thus, when integrated into Pennsylvania German, the English loan *carpet* has a medial [b] substituted for [p]. The given name *Timothy* is pronounced with an initial [d]. The voiceless interdental fricative [θ] is replaced with the voiced alveolar stop [d]. However, as shown in (10), much of this older, integrated vocabulary is now produced in fluent PG speech without any phonological adaptation.

(10) English loanwords (Louden 1997: 83)

Integrated (older forms)		Included (newer forms)
[kæbət]	>	[ka:ɾət] ‘carpet’
[bɛnsɪl]	>	[pɛnsət̩] ‘pencil’
[dɪmədi]	>	[tɪməθi] ‘Timothy’
[marɪlant]	>	[mɛ:ɾələnd] ‘Maryland’

## 4 Structure preservation and nonconvergence in PG

We believe that the organization of phonology into lexical and postlexical components accounts well for the patterning of convergence and nonconvergence found in Pennsylvania German among the Old Order Amish in Lancaster County. Although Lexical Phonology originally developed within a derivational approach to phonology (Kiparsky 1982), the distinction between lexical phonology and postlexical phonology, (sometimes referred to as word phonology and phrasal phonology) also plays a crucial role in many applications of Optimality Theory (Kiparsky 2000, Ito and Mester 2001). Kiparsky (1988) provides the overview of the characteristics of each component of the phonology given in (12). The key distinctions for purposes of this paper appear in boldface.

Phonemic contrast is central to Structure Preservation. Kenstowicz (1994:221) describes Structure Preservation as follows:

(11) Structure Preservation (Kenstowicz 1994: 221)

Representations within the lexicon may be composed only of elements drawn from the phonemic inventory. The phonemic inventory thus constrains the kinds of phonological rules that may apply in the lexicon. If a rule introduces or refers to a noncontrastive segment, then by Structure Preservation, that rule can apply only postlexically.

The examples of convergence with American English in (7) clearly fall within the postlexical component of the grammar. Neither American English nor Pennsylvania German has a phonological contrast between approximant *r* and tap *r*. This is unsurprising. In a crosslinguistic study of the phonology of liquids, Walsh Dickey (1997) argues that tap *r* and approximant *r* have the same phonological description. In this case, Pennsylvania German has simply replaced the older Pennsylvania German phonetic realization of *r* with its American English equivalent. The system of phonological contrasts in the lexicon is unaffected by this phonetic substitution. Likewise, the introduction of velarized ɫ as a noncontrastive phonetic variant of /l/ does not affect any phonological contrasts in Pennsylvania German. The introduction of novel phonetic segments and noncontrastive

alternations into Pennsylvania German through contact with American English indicates a growing convergence of Pennsylvania German postlexical phonology with American English postlexical phonology.

(12) Properties of Lexical & Postlexical Rules (Kiparsky 1988)

<u>Lexical (Word) phonology</u>	<u>Postlexical (Phrasal) phonology</u>
Apply within words	Also apply between words
Have lexical exceptions	Apply across the board
May be cyclic	Non-cyclic
Binary/discrete output	Gradient/scalar
<b>Observable/categorizable</b>	<b>Speaker unaware</b>
Sensitive to morphology	Phonetically conditioned
<b>Structure Preserving</b>	<b>May introduce novel segments or features</b>

On the other hand, the alternations in (8) and (9) are morphophonemic and belong to the lexical component of the phonology. In these cases the alternations all involve contrastive segments albeit in positions where phonological contrasts are neutralized. In cases of language contact, such neutralizations are often imposed on L2 and in loanword phonology. Thus, final devoicing was traditionally characteristic of Pennsylvania German-accented English. Final devoicing also occurred in integrated English loanwords. However, in situations of intensive bilingualism, speakers are able to acquire positional contrasts not present in their native lexicon both in L2 and in loanword phonology. The recent inclusion of English loanwords without phonological adaptation as in (10) indicates that these neutralizations do not apply across the board in fluent Pennsylvania German speech.

We believe that the cognitive saliency of the phoneme underlies this pattern of convergence and nonconvergence in stable bilingualism (see Eckman & Iverson 1997 for discussion). Speakers are indeed aware of phonemic contrasts and the phonological shape of words. This is consistent with observations made on the role of communicative saliency in language contact and Hudson's remarks on convergence and nonconvergence in Kupwar. In Kupwar and among Old Order sectarians, bilingualism has an important sociolinguistic function. The language spoken is an essential indicator of ethno-religious identity. Simply put, to be an Old Order sectarian, one must speak Pennsylvania German as well as dress plainly, and subscribe to non-resistance. Verbal behavior is indicative of one's membership (or nonmembership) in the community. In Kupwar and among Old Order sectarians, we see examples of morphosyntactic and phonetic convergence but little, if any, morphophonemic convergence. Therefore, the lexicon serves as the primary marker of the language being spoken and of one's group membership even though loanwords are common.

## 5 Conclusion

In all cases of language contact, speakers make use of cognitive and functional aspects of the grammatical organization of language. The lexicon is the most cognitively salient component of the grammar. Therefore lexical items are more easily borrowed than grammatical morphemes, phonemes or syntactic patterns in casual language contact. Conversely, in stable bilingual situations, the phonological shapes of lexical items are the most salient markers of the code being spoken and are therefore resistant to convergence. Maintenance of the Pennsylvania German lexicon, including Pennsylvania German morphophonemic alternations, serves to mark one's identity as an Old Order

sectarian. Therefore, there is little evidence of convergence with American English in the lexical phonology of Pennsylvania German. On the other hand, we do find convergence in the postlexical phonology of Pennsylvania German. Phonetic convergence (as well as morphosyntactic convergence) facilitates code-switching and fluency in American English without compromising the maintenance of Pennsylvania German for Old Order sectarians as a distinct language and marker of religious affiliation and ethnicity.

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