

Pomeranian in Wisconsin and Brazil

Ryan Dux
Sam Houston State University

In this talk, I present preliminary findings of a comparative investigation of Pomeranian-speaking communities in Wisconsin (WiPom) and in Brazil (BrPom). The two groups share the same geographic and linguistic origins but migrated in the mid-19th century into drastically distinct geographic and (socio)linguistics contexts, thereby providing a valuable perspective on the linguistic and sociocultural development of immigrant communities. Here, I focus on the historical and sociolinguistic development of the two groups rather than offering a linguistic comparison.

I first introduce existing research on the two communities. Although little had previously been known about BrPom, Postma's (2019) detailed account of BrPom remedies this situation, thereby enabling a comparison with research on WiPom that draws on fieldwork from both the 1960s and the past two decades (Jacob 2008, Louden 2009). Unfortunately, Postma dedicates only three pages to a discussion of WiPom (largely comprised of citations from Jacob and Louden), so it remains unclear whether and how the two groups differed in their (socio)linguistic development.

Next, I compare the groups with respect to their historical, sociopolitical and linguistic environments. After describing the linguistic and sociopolitical situation of Pomerania, I compare and contrast the two groups' motivations for migrating to their respective destinations, their experiences in the early years of settlement, and the sociohistorical context of the communities' cultural and linguistic development. Of particular interest here is how the increasing urbanization, mobilization, and Americanization, as well as the stigmatism of German-American identity during the World Wars, contrasts with the situation in Brazil during this time period.

Finally, I address issues of language shift, language identity, and bidialectalism. For one, I assess the timeline and degree to which each group has shifted to the dominant host language. WiPom is near extinction, as nearly all speakers are over 60 years old. Not only is the language no longer taught to younger generations, but the mainstream community is largely unaware that it had ever been spoken in the area. In contrast, it appears BrPom has undergone shift to the dominant language less rapidly and has enjoyed greater status and recognition by the regional community. On the other hand, I assess the groups' contact with and proficiency in High German. All WiPom speakers are aware of the differences between Pomeranian and High German (and many command High German to some degree), it is unclear whether this is also the case for BrPom speakers.

To conclude, I briefly point out some linguistic features that are shared and divergent across the two communities and point to avenues for future research related to these and other findings.

References

- Jacob, Alexandra. 2008. American Pommersch–Pommern im linguistischen Erbe Wisconsins. In: Wirrer, J. and J. Raab (eds.), *Die Deutsche Präsenz in den USA/The German Presence in the U.S.A.* 627-641. Berlin: LIT.
- Louden, Mark. 2009. Das Wisconsin-Pommersche im Spiegel deutsch-amerikanischer Sprachvarietäten. *Niederdeutsches Jahrbuch* 132: 165–176.
- Postma, Gertjan. 2019. *A Contrastive Grammar of Brazilian Pomeranian*. Benjamins.