Varieties of Pennsylvania Dutch: Post-Vernacular or Not so Simple?

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Introduction. Recently, the study of 'post-vernacular' communities is receiving more attention in the field of sociolinguistics (e.g., Shandler 2005, Reershemius 2009). **Post-vernacular language use** is the symbolic role a language plays in minority language communities after the shift to the dominant language is complete. In this presentation I examine different Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking communities (PD) with an emphasis on the distinction between non-sectarians, whose PD is now moribund (Louden & Page 2005), sectarians whose PD is active (i.e., Old Order Amish and Mennonites), and (former) sectarians whose PD ranges from active to moribund. Furthermore, I consider the degree to which the post-vernacular framework can account for the various sociolinguistic factors that condition language (dis)use in each of these groups.

Preliminary findings. Data from a sociolinguistic survey which explores the relationship between language use, cultural practices, and identity, reveal that the non-sectarian group shows evidence of post-vernacular language use. While none of the 10 non-sectarian respondents reported acquiring PD in the home, they reported symbolic functions, e.g., in music, festivals, folklore, artwork, food, etc. On the other hand, some ($n=6$), though not all ($n=5$) of the 11 sectarian respondents learned PD as a native language with this group also showing much diversity in the extent of current PD use. Interestingly, these preliminary data suggest that non-sectarians, who are usually further removed from vernacular PD use, are more likely than sectarians to view the language as an important part of their identity, though this is potentially only true for those non-sectarians who are making extra effort to re-connect with their heritage (see e.g., also Evans & Litty 2018).

Preliminary conclusion. While non-sectarians are in the final stages of language shift showing aspects of the post-vernacular phase of language use and PD-speaking sectarians have stable bilingualism (Louden & Page 2005), it is less clear how to classify current members of sectarian groups that no longer actively use PD or former members of PD-speaking sectarian groups and their descendants who may or may not maintain the language. Much work remains to be done in order to describe the situations that arise among the plethora of sectarian groups. With the survey still in progress, additional respondents will make these findings more reliable and shed more light on these phenomena. The multidimensional linguistic landscape described here offers a rich opportunity to examine the extent to which post-vernacularity can be applied to the language use of these diverse PD-speaking groups and may enhance our understanding of the factors that drive or prevent language shift cross-linguistically and the circumstances that tend to arise post-shift.

Selected References

Evans, C. & Litty, S. (May, 2019). *Not the real German: Folk perspectives on language and identity in Wisconsin Heritage German communities* [Conference Presentation]. The 24th Germanic Linguistics Annual Conference. Penn State University.

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