

THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH ON PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN

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Abstrak

Di Pennsylvania Amerika Serikat ada para pemeluk agama Kristen aliran *menonit* dan *amis* yang taat menggunakan variasi bahasa Jerman sebagai bahasa sehari-hari. Variasi bahasa Jerman tersebut dikenal sebagai dialek Pfals. Selanjutnya dialek tersebut dinamakan sebagai *Pennsylvania German* atau bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania. Masyarakat menggunakan bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania sebagai sarana komunikasi tidak resmi dalam kehidupan sehari-hari, sementara untuk urusan yang sifatnya resmi seperti dalam bidang perdagangan, birokrasi, dan dalam bahasa tulis mereka menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Dengan demikian dalam masyarakat tersebut terdapat situasi diglosia antara bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania dan bahasa Inggris. Bahasa Inggris memiliki pengaruh yang dalam beberapa hal sangat kontroversial terhadap kehidupan masyarakat dan bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania (Burridge & Enninger 1992 dll.). Sebagai contoh ditunjukkan oleh adanya perselisihan di antara para anggota sektarian agama yang disebabkan oleh meningkatnya penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam acara-acara peribadatan; di samping itu, peningkatan penggunaan bahasa Inggris dalam kegiatan keagamaan juga telah mengakibatkan perpecahan di antara masyarakat pemeluk agama. Gramatika bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania mendapat pengaruh dari gramatika bahasa Inggris. Kosakata dalam bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania terdiri dari banyak kata serapan yang berasal dari bahasa Inggris, baik yang telah sepenuhnya terintegrasi atau hanya sebagian terintegrasi. Meskipun demikian, tidak semua perubahan gramatika dalam bahasa Jerman dialek Pennsylvania dapat dirunut ke dalam gramatika bahasa Inggris.

Ada beberapa dialek Jerman lain (yang digunakan di Russia, di Argentina, di Jerman dll.) di mana terdapat perubahan yang sama walaupun bahasa resmi bukan bahasa Inggris. Sebab itu perubahan sistem gramatika tidak hanya terjadi karena ada pengaruh oleh bahasa Inggris tetapi ikut proses *grammaticalization*.

Kata kunci: Pennsylvaniadeutsch, dialek, diglosia

A. Introduction

In the 16th and 17th century in Germany it was difficult for certain religious groups, the Anabaptists, to practice their religion. To escape persecution they had to leave the country and thus they began their long journey to Pennsylvania in the United States of America. Here they were granted religious freedom and given land to be used for farming. Most of these pilgrims came from the southern part of Germany, a region called *Pfalz*. In the course of time the majority of these immigrants were integrated into the American society and now could no longer be distinguished from non-Anabaptists. However there are some areas left where the Anabaptists still live a life like in the old days.

These Mennonites or Amish people (as they are called after the founders of their religious groups) live a very humble life according to the bible. Their way of living is similar to life in the 19th century. Worldly goods like electricity, cars, radios or alike are forbidden in their communities because according to their beliefs, these will only distract them from their religious life. Education is limited to 6 years in the local school; higher education is considered unnecessary as everything which needs to be learned, i.e. the contents of the bible, can be taught in 6 years. Illiteracy is high among conservative members of the congregations because they never learn to write or discuss any general subject, but instead they memorize the different psalms from the bible. Amish people can be recognized by their distinctive way of dressing (for more information on the lives of Anabaptists, see the articles in Burrige & Enninger 1992, Dow & Wolff 1997).

The Anabaptists live in closed communities with very strict rules. Disobeying the rules leads to exclusion from the community. The language that the Anabaptists use is an old German dialect which resembles the *Pfalz* dialect, but which also has had some influence from *schwäbisch*, *badisch* or *schweizerdeutsch*. This German dialect, which is called *Pennsylvania German* (henceforth PG), is the Mennonites and

Amish people's everyday language. An archaic form of High Standard German is used for worship, but nowadays there are no more Anabaptists who are able to really understand this archaic language. The verses from the bible are memorized without understanding their contents, the sermons in church are in PG. Unfortunately there are a lot of young people who no longer fully understand PG. The use of English as a language of instruction in church and for missionary purposes therefore leads to a constant quarrel between the members of the religious communities and quite often results in a split of the congregation.

Very traditional Anabaptists use the English language only to outsiders. As a result of this there is a diglossic language situation: Mennonites and Amish people use English with their non-Anabaptist neighbours or for official purposes while PG is the everyday language in the community. As PG is an oral language everything which needs to be written has to be in English even if it concerns the community and is therefore in the usual domain of PG. Consequently English has a major influence on PG (see the articles in Burrige & Enninger 1992, Dow & Wolff 1997). The Anabaptists do not have any contact with other German dialect speakers or access to Standard High German. One has to keep in mind that the vocabulary these people are using derives from the 16th and 17th century which means that goods not invented back then cannot be named with a German word. Therefore the only way of enriching the vocabulary is by borrowing from English. The PG grammar has also experienced some changes as will be seen below.

The problem which presents itself now is the question whether all changes of the PG language can in fact be attributed to the influence of English, as Loudon (1997), Burrige (1992), van Ness (1994) or Huffines (1989, 1992, 1997) describe. As this article will show, we can find similar developments in other German dialects, for example German dialects in Russia or in South America where the influence of the English language is simply not possible. The Modern Standard High

German also experiences some changes similar to those described for PG. I will present evidence which will lead to the rejection of the thesis of the influence of English on every aspect of PG.

B. Method and Data

The PG dialect is a well described German dialect. It has been under constant surveillance for the last 40 years or even more, mostly from North American and German scholars (see Burrige & Enninger 1992, Dow & Wolff 1997). They have collected their language data by interviewing Mennonites and Amish people in several communities, both during free conversation as well as by constructing tests to extract special grammatical constructions, i.e. on the use of case in PG or on progressive constructions. I will use this data to support my thesis.

To start with, let us have a look at two different aspects of PG, namely the lexicon of PG as well as syntactic constructions. The examples given will show the ways in which English may have had an influence on PG.

1. The Influence of English on the Lexicon of PG

In the PG lexicon, there are two different kinds of lexemes which have been borrowed from English. On the one hand, there are lexemes for those objects that do not have a PG equivalent, for example as names for new technology as can be seen in example 1:

1. *truck, pickup, binder, loader, elevator, trailer* (Ness 1994:292)

On the other hand there are lexemes that do have a PG equivalent as can be seen in example 2. In most cases the borrowed lexemes are nouns, there are only some verbs or adverbs. The PG equivalent is given in brackets.

2. *birdie* (PG: Voggel), *robin* (PG: Amschel), *but* (PG: awwer), *visite* (PG: psuche) (Louden 1997:84).

There is no doubt that these lexemes have been borrowed from English.

Different reasons can be attributed for this borrowing. The class of lexemes mentioned in example 1 denote new technology that was not yet invented in the 16th or 17th century when the PG speakers emigrated to Pennsylvania. Consequently these lexemes do not exist in the PG lexicon. As the speakers don't have access to German input, neither via other German speakers (both dialect or Standard High German) nor via German TV or radio programs (which they cannot hear or see because of the exclusion of new technology from most communities) there is no way to get German language input. If the need to name new objects arises, the names can either be invented from the existing PG vocabulary (this nearly never happens) or they have to be borrowed from English.

The borrowing of lexemes like those mentioned in example 2, which do have a PG equivalent indicate the importance and the prestige of English in comparison to PG. English fulfils important functions in the life of the Anabaptists, i.e. it is used in official contexts or as a medium of written communication (see the diglossic language situation in a PG society). Although the Anabaptists see themselves as willingly being separated from the English speaking world, they are still part of the American society. There are a lot of activities like *quilting* or *Sunday school* which are mentioned as being typical Anabaptist activities but which are very American in nature.

There is no dispute over the question of whether lexemes are borrowed from English. The discussion starts when it comes to the question of whether these borrowings are a new phenomena or an old one (see Ness 1994, Loudon 1997). This matter will not be further discussed in this article.

2. The Influence of English on the Syntax of PG

In contrast to the influence of English on the lexicon of PG there are discussions on the question whether English also has an influence on the syntax of PG.

In their work Huffines (1989, 1992, 1997) and Loudon (1992)

found a change in the PG syntax. When using case markers, PG speakers no longer use 3 cases as in the original *Pfalz* dialect (nominative, dative and accusative) but restrict their use of case markers to a 2- resp. 1-case-system. This reduction of a case system is attributed to the convergence to English. Starting from a 3-case-system (the genitive which exists in Standard High German has not been mentioned in their studies as it never existed in the *Pfalz* dialect) they found convergence to a 1-case-system for determiners and a 2-case-system for pronouns using a special case to indicate a subject or an object. This resembles the English case system. According to Huffines (1989, 1992) the former dative form of a pronoun merges with the accusative form of a pronoun, see examples 3 and 4 where the dative form *ihne* or *ihre* is replaced by the accusative form *sie*:

3. Ich hab **sie** geschder gholfe.

(lit.: I helped **she** yesterday).

4. wann ich **sie** par Blumme gewwe.

(lit.: when I gave **she** flowers) (Huffines 1992:171)

To express possession, Anabaptists will make use of a determiner which is no longer distinguished for case as can be seen in example 5 (Huffines wanted to get an answer on the question: *Whose dog is this?* or in PG: *Wem sai hnd is sel?*).

5. **Mei** Großdadi seine.

lit.: it is **my** grandpa **his** dog.“ (Huffines 1989:218)

According to Huffines there is more evidence for convergence to English to be found, namely in the use of *sei + am + infinitive* which resembles the English progressive form *ing* and is used to express durative actions as illustrated in examples 6 and 7:

6. Des Gebei **iss am** gebaut warre bei mei Onkel.

(lit.: This building **is** in the progress of **being built** by my uncle.)

(Huffines 1997:58)

7. Sie **is am** Blumme **blanze**.

(lit.: She is **planting** flowers.)(Huffines 1997:57)

It is interesting to note that these changes seem to be recent ones. The

data collected from elder members of the Anabaptists (age 65 and above) does not contain constructions using *sei + am + infinitive* to express a durative action. Instead they stick to the dative construction as shown in examples 8 - 11:

8. Ich hab **ihne** geschder gholfe.
(lit.: I helped **them** yesterday.) (Huffines 1992:171)
9. Wann ich **ihre** Blumme bringe deet.
(lit.: When I bring **her** flowers.) (Huffines 1992:171)
10. **Meim** Grenpäp seine.
(lit.: **My** granddad's dog).“ (Huffines 1989:218)
11. Des Gebei watt gebaut bei **meim** Onkel.
(lit.: This building was built by **my** uncle.) (Huffines 1997:58)

The constructions mentioned in examples 3 to 7 are only used by the younger Anabaptists.

C. Discussion

There seems to be an influence of English on PG not only in regard to the lexicon but also concerning the syntax of PG. According to Huffines (1989, 1992, 1997) there is a lot of evidence for a convergence to English, especially in the use of case markers and in the way of expressing a durative action. Interestingly enough, one has to mention that the loss of case marking and the durative marking can also be found in German dialects in non English speaking surroundings as will be seen below. A detailed explanation follows.

Religious pilgrimage not only took place from Germany to Pennsylvania but also from Germany to Russia. In Russia the pilgrims were granted religious freedom and given land to set up their villages. The Anabaptists were allowed to use their own language and live according to their customs and beliefs. Their dialects have also been carefully studied by Russian scholars. Unfortunately during the cold war era it was not possible to get any information on German dialects spoken in the regions behind the iron curtain so no comparison could be made

between Anabaptist dialects in Pennsylvania and those in Russia.

Another speech island of German dialects can be found in South America (Brasilia, Argentina and Paraguay) as some of the Pennsylvanian pilgrims continued their journey after leaving Pennsylvania. When the American school board of education forced the Anabaptists to use English as the language of instruction in school, some group members looked for a new place to live where they would be separated from the surrounding society. This place was found in South America. Neither the German dialects in Russia nor those in South America can possibly have been influenced by English. So if the above mentioned convergence in PG can be attributed solely to English, we should not be able to find similar developments in other German dialects. Let us now take a look at the grammatical constructions used in German dialects which are spoken in Russia or in Ukraine. Berend & Jedig (1991) as well as Keel (1994) examined the language of the Russian Mennonites. They discovered that the loss of case marking can also be found in this dialect. The dialect spoken in Jekaterinenburg no longer distinguishes two different forms for the dative and accusative case. Both cases merged into one case denoting an object (the form looks like an accusative marking) in opposition to nominative marking which denotes a subject as illustrated in examples 12 and 13:

12. **Komm zu mich.**

(lit.: Come to **me**) (Berend & Jedig 1991:161)

13. **Ich war bei dich.**

(lit.: I was with you) (Berend & Jedig 1991:161)

The same development can be found in German dialects which are spoken near the Russian-Romanian border. Here the dative marker is replaced by an accusative marker which denotes an object. The decrease of case to a 1-case-system can already be found as one can see in examples 14 and 15, where the required accusative determiner *den* (ex. 14) resp. the question marker *wem* (ex. 15) fused with the nominative

marker *der* resp. *wer*.

14. Ich seh **der** Vater.

(lit.: I see **the** (all case) father.) (Berend & Jedig 1991:161)

15. Wer sei Buch is des?

(lit.: **Who** is this book?) (Berend & Jedig 1991:161)

The reduction of case does not necessarily eliminate the dative markers in favour of accusative markers. In a German dialect spoken in Siberia (Altai-Gebirge), the dative markers are still frequently used, while the accusative markers have been deleted in favour of the dative markers as Jedig (1966:65) points out. See example 16 where the masculine accusative form *den* merged with the form *dem* as in example 17:

16. older form: ich geh in **den** Wald.

(I go to **the** woods.)

17. younger form: ich geh in **dem** Wald.

(I go to **the** woods.)

Jedig's data also show the development of a 1-case-system. Additional to his data, this phenomenon has also been described for other German dialects in the former Soviet Union, see also Grinjawja 1980 for the Altai region, Kusmina 1961 for Kamyschi (also in Altai region) and Klassen 1980 for Orenburg in Ukraine, all cited in Berend & Jedig 1991). The loss of case marking has not only been mentioned for dialects outside the German speaking area, but it can also be found in several German dialects which are still in use in Germany. According to Shier (1965:423) there are examples from *Pfälzerisch* (Pfalz region) where the distinction between three different case systems, namely nominative, dative and accusative has been simplified to become only nominative and dative case. In contrast to Soviet German dialects the merging did not take place between dative and accusative case marking but between nominative and accusative case marking. The accusative case markers merged into the more frequent nominative case markers. In the upper north region of Germany there is only one form left for all different cases,

namely the form *de*.

The same situation presents itself when one looks at the progressive form which expresses a durative action. In the German *Hunsrück* dialect spoken in the south of Brasilia constructions which use *sei + am + infinitive* frequently occur, as illustrated in examples 18 and 19):

18. Siehst du net, dass ich des Licht **am anmache sin**.

(lit.: Don't you see that I **am switching** on the light?) (Göz Kaufmann, p.c.)

19. Der is net do, weil der is dei Papa **am helfe**.

(lit.: He is not at home because he **is helping** your dad.) (Göz Kaufmann, p.c.)

Not only do we find these constructions in German dialects abroad, but also in modern German dialects which are still spoken in Germany like *Ripuarisch* as illustrated in examples 20 and 21:

20. hömma hier, bin die ganze Pokale **am abstaubm**.

(lit.: Listen, I **am dusting** all the goblets.) (*Helden 1*, Z. 231, data from René Schiering 2002)

21. seit neunzehnhundertachtzich binn=ich dat **am meldn**.

(lit.: I **have been reporting** this since the 1980s.) (*Helden 1*, Z. 631)

Even in Modern Standard High German, sentences with a progressive aspect can frequently be found.

Neither the German dialects in Russia nor those in Brasilia or Germany have direct contact with English. Still the grammatical changes described for PG which are considered to be the cause of English influence can be found in these dialects as well. This means the transition to a loss of case marking or the way of how to express a durative aspect seems to be a unique change not restricted to PG and the language of the surrounding society.

There is still another reason against the assumption of English influence on progressive constructions. The English progression uses a

form of the verb *to be* (I *am*, he *is* etc.) in combination with an *ing* suffix on the main verb. In contrast to this the German dialects use a form of the verb *sein* (to be) like *ich bin, er ist* (I *am*, he *is*), a preposition *am* (at) and the infinitive of a verb. The German dialects therefore use a preposition which is never used in the English construction by which the language has supposedly been influenced. One wonders how English can be the reason for a special change in a language like the construction of progressive aspect if the construction in the language to be influenced is even more difficult than the influencing one.

A possible explanation for the transition described until now can already be found when looking at grammars on Modern Standard High German like the one from Sütterlin (1924). Sütterlin dates the beginning of Modern Standard High German to the mid 17th century. Even back then a loss of case marking can already be predicted as will be seen in example 22. In this example he mentions a German dialect which no longer uses the dative case marker *dem* but instead prefers the accusative case marker *den*:

22. Ik hef **den** man det bouk gäm.

(lit.: I have given **the** man the book.) (Sütterlin 1924:318)

Constructions expressing a durative action can also be found; they use a progressive aspect as in the above mentioned examples, see examples 23 and 24:

23. Wir sind **am Essen**.

(lit.: We are **eating**.)

24. He es **am Stengkloppen**.

(lit.: He is **cutting** stones.) (Sütterlin 1924:464)

One may assume that the beginning of case loss or the construction of durative aspect was already in progress when the pilgrims moved to Pennsylvania. So they already took this change with them to their new home country.

Although the transition to case loss becomes more and more frequent and can no longer be denied as existing, one does not find

information on this in grammars on PG (see & Barba 1965, Frey 1942 [rpt.1981], Haag 1982, Haldeman 1872, Horne 1905, Learned 1889). The above mentioned scholars describe PG as having a 3-case-system and reject constructions like *sei + am + infinitive* to express a durative aspect. There seems to be a discrepancy between these grammars and real life. In fact all these grammars are normative in nature. They describe the way PG sentences *should* be built and do not mention the everyday usage of the language. This phenomenon can be found in every existing language. Normative grammars on Modern Standard High German like Duden (1998) or Eisenberg (1986) do not mention sentences like *ich bin am Lesen* (I am reading) as these constructions are considered to be bad German language which is not worth mentioning in a grammar on *Standard German*.

D. Results

English plays an important role in the life of the PG Anabaptists. Several language domains are predominantly English, every written text has to be in English as well. One cannot deny the prestige English has as a language. English does also have an influence on some parts of the PG grammar, but contrary to the hypothesis of Huffines and her colleagues, not every change in the PG grammar can be attributed to the influence of the surrounding language English. Some phenomena described by them occur in German dialects in other non-English regions as well. The language change therefore seems to be a universal change which does not take place because of the influence of one particular language. The change of grammar does not seem to be a recent one but probably already occurred in the 16th or 17th century when the Anabaptists left Germany for Pennsylvania, Russia and South America.

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