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## Review of *German Language, Cradle of Our Heritage*—Amos Hoover

Roslyn Burns

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Review of: **Hoover, Amos B. 2018. *German Language, Cradle of Our Heritage: A Study of the Importance of the Pennsylvania German Language and the Struggles in Maintaining It in a Modern English Environment. Special Attention Is Given to Its Effect on People; on Anabaptists in General, and Old Order Mennonites in Particular.* Ephrata, PA: Self-published. 311pp, h/c, \$65.00.**

By Roslyn Burns  
Reed College

*German Language, Cradle of our Heritage* provides a window into the social story behind heritage language maintenance among High German-speaking Swiss Mennonites (as opposed to the Low German-speaking Netherlandic Mennonites). Pennsylvania German, also known as Pennsylvania Dutch, is a variety of New World High German, historically spoken in the Old Order Mennonite community, among others. As with many heritage languages in the United States today, Pennsylvania German has faced obsolescence due to a gradual contraction of the appropriate social settings for heritage language. In these communities, American English use expands and fills the social spaces that were historically reserved for the heritage language.

Hoover takes the readers through various manifestations of the Old Order Mennonite's heritage language (written, spoken, sung, and a brief mention of signed), and discusses the role of the different language traditions within the community. The author provides a wide array of written primary sources to help the reader understand the differences in the writing tradition, both stylistically and visually. The reader, who may be unfamiliar with the older writing systems used in Mennonite and Amish communities, can get a clear sense of the structure of Fraktur print and cursive (called "Gothic" by many community members). The reader also gets a feel for the types of vibrant, visual embellishments characteristic of Mennonite and Amish written work.

In addition to discussing the actual language, Hoover outlines how the language has come to symbolize the struggles faced by a community

trying to manage internal and external pressures on their traditional way of life. The book allows the reader to develop an understanding of the close connection between language decisions involving schooling and the consequences that these decisions have for the structure of the church. In some cases, the author notes that language becomes a proxy for a wide variety of conflicts, whether they are linguistic in nature or not. In many cases, community conflicts over language are actually conflicts over modernization, connections to the outside world, and attitudes that individuals and communities take towards concepts of "otherness." There are some cases where transmission of knowledge is the direct concern. For example, some community members are concerned about the integrity of their religion if they were to switch services to English. This is because they would need to provide English Bibles, many of which lack the Apocryphal books commonly found in German Bibles.

*German Language, Cradle of our Heritage* is presented in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the reader to the various names used for the language and the broad social situation facing language use in the community. Chapter two is mostly comprised of interviews, letters, and observations. In this chapter, the reader can see firsthand how the Pennsylvania German language is structured in notes and interviews. Chapter three presents previously unpublished material addressing the use of language and how it relates to both internal and external conflicts. Chapter four summarizes previously published work on use and maintenance of Pennsylvania German. The previously published works include contributions from community members and language scholars alike. Finally, chapter five summarizes the overall findings of the work.

One of the most interesting properties of the book is the fact that Hoover is a member of the speech community, yet he tries to give an objective and critical perspective to the discussion of language. There are many interviews which overtly express language ideology, and sometimes the author mentions as much. Hoover also takes special care to mention when he is interpreting something. These actions all support the view of his

objectivity. This is why it is interesting to note the appearance of the author's own language ideology in the book (e.g. in discussion of cursive, changes in grammar, etc.). For example, in constructing the argument of how English language use has influenced Old Order Mennonite culture, the author discusses *es Mädél* 'the girl'. This noun is historically neuter, but it has come to be marked with the feminine pronoun *sie* '3sg feminine' instead of the expected neuter pronoun *es* '3sg neuter'. The author reasons that due to English influence, the grammatical gender of the noun switched, and in turn, people reinterpreted head-covering rules to apply to young girls when they historically didn't (p.28). The biggest problem with this argument is that *-l* at the end of *Mädél* is a diminutive marker (historically the root is *Maad* 'maid' or Standard German *Magd* 'maid'). Diminutive markers can trigger non-neuter stems to bear neuter grammatical gender, and in fact there are a variety of these so-call hybrid nouns which differ in terms of natural gender and grammatical gender. In Standard German, the diminutive marker *-chen* triggers all stems to be marked with neuter as in *das Mädchen* 'the little girl', but native speakers of Standard German will alternate between the pronouns *sie* '3sg feminine' and *es* '3sg neuter' (see Braun & Haig 2010 for Standard German; Toebosch 2011 for Dutch and Plautdietsch; and Nübling 2015 for Luxembourgish). This is not to say that the author is incorrect about English influencing the structure of Pennsylvania German, which in turn precipitates changes in Old Order Mennonite culture; it is just that the claims about linguistic structure should be supported and qualified in order to avoid misleading the reader.

Overall, *German Language, Cradle of our Heritage* is an impressive compilation of primary source documents and interviews. It may, however, be difficult for the reader, who is not already familiar with the communities, to follow due to these rich but dense primary sources and interviews. Additionally, the book's structure may take some time for academic readers interested in the community because it does not follow a traditional format of introduction, literature survey, body, and conclusion. In spite of this, anyone who is not a community member but has an interest in longitudinal community-based accounts of language maintenance will be rewarded for taking the time to read such a thorough and thoughtful work.

## References

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