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## Teaching Identity: German Language Instruction in Old Order Schools

“Mir selle die Weltsproch net brauche—  
schunst grickt die Welt uns—un no de Deifel.”

[We shouldn't use the world's language  
because the world will get us and then the devil.]

(Nineteenth-Century Missouri Preacher John Kauffman)

### Language Education and Old Order Identity

According to a note found in the Muddy Creek Farm Library, in a box of materials pertaining to German in the Plain Churches, the late scholar John Hostetler once asked Joe Byler, then editor of *The Diary*, a monthly Old Order Amish publication, if the time would ever come that the Amish would pray in English. This seemed like a strange question to Joe Byler, but he finally answered, “Once the Amish pray in English they are no longer Amish.”

Pennsylvania German, Amish High German (AHG),<sup>1</sup> and English play complex roles for the Amish and Mennonite groups that continue to use these three languages, and their use according to socially-defined domains is one of the most powerful practices identifying and defining Old Order church-communities.<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania German, an unwritten, unstandardized language, acts to keep the group separate from the dominant, English-speaking society. Old Order children learn Pennsylvania German as a first language, and its use continues to mark oral intra-community interaction. Amish High German (AHG), on the other hand, is the language of the Bible and the hymns and traditional prayers that have been handed down over the centuries. Once widely spoken and written in Old Order communities, AHG or “Bible German,” is now little used outside of the church service. Nevertheless, as Jakobsh, notes, all adult members of the community must “have a minimal mastery of the language in order to participate meaningfully [...]”<sup>3</sup> Although spoken AHG is not the same as written AHG,<sup>4</sup> members of Old Order communities seldom distinguish the two. Finally, English, although the language of written communication within the church-community, is “the world's language.”

This pattern of language interaction, while characteristic of language use in Old

Order church-communities, is not a constant. English education and the access English proficiency gives to the surrounding society have opened church-communities to the influence of the outside world and paved the way for a variety of changes, some of which have divided congregations.<sup>5</sup> Today, patterns of language use continue to distinguish one church-community from another.<sup>6</sup>

When the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonites began to establish their own private schools in the mid-twentieth century, they started to put both English and German in their respective places. The *Standards of the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite Parochial and Vocational Schools of Penna.*, which influenced Old Order private schools across the United States and Canada, asserted that “[t]he English language should be spoken at all times by the teacher and pupils while school is in session, except German classes.”<sup>7</sup> The *Regulations and Guidelines for Amish Parochial Schools of Indiana* explicitly linked German instruction in schools to the use of AHG in religious contexts, noting “[t]he worship services of the Old Order Amish are conducted in German. If this is to continue, foresight must be exercised in passing the German language to succeeding generations [...]”<sup>8</sup>

Despite the importance of German in Old Order communities, however, there is no standard German language pedagogy for all Old Order schools. As Byler put it, “How much, when, and in what way depends entirely on the teacher, the board, and the parents.”<sup>9</sup> Old Order schools vary in the frequency with which they hold AHG classes, the textbooks they use, the kinds of exercises teachers assign students, how teachers test proficiency, and the goals Old Order church-communities set for AHG instruction. For example, although according a place for German instruction in the curriculum, the Pennsylvania *Standards* also made it secondary, offering no further details on its instruction nor listing it in either the discussion on religion in one-room parochial schools or in the elaboration of “The Education Program” in Standard 7. Similarly, in contrast to the detailed instructions provided to guide the teaching of English, the Indiana *Regulations* do not specify when or how to teach German.<sup>10</sup>

In Old Order schools, the tension between English and AHG, the two language varieties Old Order children must formally study, brings into sharp focus the role language plays in the church-community itself. How German is used and taught in Old Order schools helps to reflect and reinforce patterns of behavior that define and preserve Old Order communities and their distinct identities. While the most conservative schools provide instruction in written AHG in a way that explicitly links this linguistic variety to religious ritual, more progressive schools provide students with stories in AHG about their own Old Order life, with questions that emphasize translation and the comprehension and production of AHG in every day conversation. This different emphasis shapes language use in a way that defines for Old Order children—future church members—the boundaries between their own community and others, and between secular and sacred.

### **German in Swartzentruber Amish Schools**

In the one-room schoolhouses of the Swartzentruber Amish, among the most conservative of all Old Order groups, children learn English, German, and basic arithmetic, and, through these, the patterns of social interaction, work ethic,

discipline, and obedience to authority that will make them good church members. In Swartzentruber schools, German lessons begin in third or fourth grade and take place on Fridays. In most schools, this is accomplished by simply substituting German reading for English reading and German spelling for English. Thus, learning "Bible" German and learning English are, in several ways, linked. Both have limited use within the Swartzentruber community, both are school subjects, both must be studied.

English and AHG have clearly restricted domains in the Swartzentruber world. Since their first language, Pennsylvania German, is not written, every day reading material in Swartzentruber homes, including local newspapers, and letters from Old Order friends and relatives, is in English. After chores are done, children might sit and read silently to themselves those texts parents consider appropriate, just as, at school, after their work is done, children are permitted to get a book off the shelf for silent reading. Parents seldom read stories to their children at home, and teachers use oral reading in English only to reinforce vocabulary and to evaluate students' progress. Spoken English is not approved for intra-community interaction.<sup>11</sup>

AHG is even more restricted in its use. Children hear it when the Bible is read, when hymns are sung, and when the preachers incorporate it in their sermons and prayers. Like English, AHG is not for conversation with family and Swartzentruber friends.

Pedagogy reinforces this linguistic behavior. Few Swartzentruber children know much, if any, English when they begin school at age six, and the teacher sees as her first task teaching them the "1 2 3s and the ABCs."<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, even as teachers help their pupils to become fluent in English so that they can read and talk to outsiders, they limit the effects of language education in a variety of subtle ways. In school, for example, written English is studied only in the context of spelling lessons and penmanship. Students do not write essays or practice letter writing, except as they copy out of their penmanship books. Similarly, oral English is the language of lessons, not of social interaction. As one teacher noted, "We learn Dutch [Pennsylvania German] at home. In school it's time to learn our English, but the only time we talk English is during lessons."

Even then, if English proves too difficult, children turn to Pennsylvania German to ask questions and get help and support. In a second grade phonics class, for example, the teacher read the workbook instructions in English but then used Pennsylvania German to explain what was required and to answer all the children's questions. As a teacher of several years experience put it, when asked why she tended to use Pennsylvania German to explain problems to her scholars, "[It] still comes the handiest for me to talk [Pennsylvania] German because that's the language we use the most." When school is not formally in session, such as during recess or lunch, teachers generally use Pennsylvania German.<sup>13</sup>

English language instruction helps to set "school" apart from "social interaction" and community. Instruction in AHG, on the other hand, helps to mark the boundary between everyday work and worship, and the use of AHG in classroom activities clearly marks those who are old enough to begin to take responsibility for religious interaction and those who are not. Swartzentruber children generally begin the school day with three hymns, all in German, from the *Liedersammlung*, a songbook dating to 1892. The first, second, and third graders leave their own seats to crowd in next to

an older child. These youngest scholars are not expected to join in because they have not yet learned to read the German script in the songbook. As they do during church services, they stand quietly next to older siblings or neighbors, who, in contrast, have begun to learn songs that will be sung Sunday evenings, at gatherings of "young folks,"<sup>14</sup> or at singings that follow weddings. Older children take turns leading the songs, training that will prepare the boys to be *Vorsingers* or song leaders during the worship service.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while speaking Pennsylvania German identifies them with the church-community, learning to read AHG signals a growing responsibility to participate in its religious life.

English and AHG are taught in the same way. Oral reading in English begins in first grade when the teacher models the text for the student one word at a time. Standing over a child, she points from word to word with her pencil, stressing each item equally in a monotone that ends on a falling note only with the last word. In one lesson, the teacher modeled a sentence in this way for a first grader and then instructed the child "try and say it [the English sentence] quickly." Like the teacher, the child produced a monotone string of syllables, each receiving the same stress, distinguished at the end only by a falling tone on the last syllable.

Often the contrast between oral reading and conversation is striking, as when the teacher models the sentence in a chant-like monotone to the children and then translates it into conversational Pennsylvania German. One teacher, for example, introducing a new passage to a fourth grade class, read the sentence, "See-how-the-goats-pull," one word at a time, each word evenly stressed and uttered in a monotone that fell only at the last syllable. The children repeated each word as the teacher read it. She then gave the Pennsylvania German translation, "[seəŋč vi di ges tsiə]" in a cheerful, conversational tone while pointing to the picture.<sup>16</sup>

Teachers use the same techniques when they begin to teach children to read AHG, with the same result. When they read aloud, children render the AHG text in a sing-song monotone that is difficult to follow or comprehend. The chant-like quality of both oral English and oral German reading in Swartzentruber schools links this activity to other ritualized language use, most particularly to the cadence of German preaching, and reinforces the church-community's belief that neither "Bible German" nor English are meant for daily interpersonal interaction within the Swartzentruber community, English because it is the language one uses to speak to outsiders and AHG because it is the language of the Bible and prayer.<sup>17</sup>

Making no connection in their lessons between AHG and Pennsylvania German, teachers assume that AHG, like English, will be difficult to learn. As one teacher noted, "[learning Bible German] is just as hard. It's the same as learning English." Another commented, "Dutch [Pennsylvania German] and German [Standard German] are two different languages." She noted that she could understand some German but not talk it, although she could "understand the preacher when he talks it."

Because the Swartzentruber Amish use English and AHG only in particular circumstances, the range of topics one discusses using either language is limited. The texts they use for their lessons build in these limitations. To learn to read and write English, for example, children use *McGuffey's Readers* and the 1919 series, *Essentials of English Spelling*, texts that present archaic English grammar and vocabulary.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, to study AHG, third graders start by learning their ABCs with the *Das erste Deutsche Lesebuch* [The First German Reading Book], a work which first appeared in

1887. This text introduces them to the *Fraktur* script used in their church hymnbook, the *Ausbund*, and the German Bible. For the Swartzentruber Amish, learning AHG, or, as they call it, “Bible German” is in large part learning to read and write the *fraktur* script of the texts, which is considered the only appropriate script for German spelling and reading.<sup>19</sup> Children chant the German alphabet, just as they chanted the ABCs before beginning to read, and older children memorize German spelling words. By the fifth grade, pupils are reading *Biblische Geschichten* [Bible Stories], a text printed entirely in *Fraktur* with archaic engraved illustrations and no English translation. By the seventh grade *Das Neue Testament* [The New Testament] has become their reading book. There is no translation, and teachers do not require children to answer questions about reading passages. Indeed, once the children have begun to read from the New Testament, it would be inappropriate for the teacher—who is usually female, often not yet baptized, and certainly not a minister—to question them on what they have read or, in any way, appear to be “teaching scripture.”

In his survey of German texts used in Old Order Mennonite schools in Ontario, Jakobsh points out numerous deviations from modern standard German and suggests that these remain in the school texts because “there is not the slightest intention among these ‘plain folk’ to emulate the writing or speaking conventions of people in Germany.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the Swartzentruber Amish are not bothered by the archaic English of their school texts because they have no desire for their children to learn the conventions of the surrounding non-Amish society.<sup>21</sup> Nor are they concerned that the German their children study might be archaic; for them, it is not. The German Swartzentruber children study in their schools prepares them to read texts handed down for generations. This German and its *Fraktur* script reinforce the ties binding the community to its forebears.

Through language use and instruction, Swartzentruber schools reinforce community values and protect children from the values of the outside world. Pennsylvania German becomes further identified as the language of community, of fun and group activities, of support when things become difficult, of being Swartzentruber. Children learn to read English in the silent, passive way that they will use to read the Old Order newspapers, and they learn to write English well enough to correspond with others. Oral English remains the language one uses to communicate with the unfamiliar and often difficult world that is outside their own. AHG is linked to reading the Bible, singing hymns, and formal religious settings. That schools bring the hymns and sacred texts into the classroom reinforces the notion that school is preparing children for active participation in their own church-community, not for interaction with the surrounding society.

### **Blurring the Boundaries**

Patterns of language use and instruction change as Old Order communities evolve differing relationships with other Old Order groups and the surrounding non-Old Order society. Like the Swartzentruber Amish, more progressive groups continue to emphasize their separation from worldly society, yet, at the same time, they have begun to permit members to interact more freely with the non-Old Order world. In some communities, for example, members engage in wage labor for non-Old

Order employers, while others own businesses that serve a primarily non-Old Order clientele. At the same time, the growing economic dependence on the surrounding society has fostered closer working relationships with other Old Order groups, even those with which they do not fellowship.

Although members of more progressive communities desire, like the Swartzentruber Amish, to educate their children for an Amish life, they do not educate them for the same kind of Amish life, and the private schooling that has developed in these communities reflects different and broader educational goals. As one parent put it, "times change and so education must change for the times." Schools must prepare children to interact with the world but give them the wherewithal to remain separate from it.

Given their increased interaction with the non-Old Order world, many in more progressive communities believe that the children must come to use English as naturally as they use Pennsylvania German, and so teachers emphasize the use of English for all classroom interaction. Stressing phonics as the analysis of language and as a means of acquiring new vocabulary and greater facility in reading,<sup>22</sup> teachers regularly point out patterns in word structure and encourage children to sound out words. At one school, for example, the teacher asked her first graders what new word they would have if they took [ʃi] "she" and added the sound [p] to the end. Pressing them further, she asked them whether the [ʃ] "sh" sound was at the beginning or the end of the new word and then proceeded to ask them to find the sound in a word list. Finally, she sent them to their seats to circle the sound as it appeared in the list of words in their workbook. Assuming that children will be interacting frequently with those outside their church-community, teachers often emphasize pronunciation. As one teacher argued, "if school is going to give them enough learning to go on in life and make a living, you want them to learn English," and she asserted further that she wanted her students "not just to speak it but to speak it properly."

As English is emphasized, the role of German as a general marker of Old Order identity becomes more important, and the distinction community members draw between spoken Pennsylvania German and written AHG becomes less clear. One teacher noted that the German studied in school "is not like what we speak, but we hear it in church and are familiar with it." Then she added, "The words are probably the same, but they're said differently."<sup>23</sup>

The texts themselves blur the distinction between the oral Pennsylvania German of home and the written German of school. Published by the Old Order Amish Pathway Publishing Company in Aylmer, Ontario, *Let's Learn German* (a workbook for beginners)<sup>24</sup> and the follow-up text *Let's Read German* present German in exercises and stories set in an Amish context. The introduction to *Let's Read German* makes it clear that the goal of the German lessons is to teach children to read the Bible,<sup>25</sup> but, as the editors note, "The stories in the book [...] relate true-to-life incidents which could happen to any child. Many of the stories teach a moral."

In linking written German to everyday life, these texts no longer distinguish between texts and activities that are sacred and those that are not. The mixing of *Fraktur* and Roman fonts within the texts further obscures the distinction between religious German and worldly English. The stories in *Let's Read German*, for example, which focus on the adventures of an Amish family, are printed in *Fraktur*, but the Bible verses found at the end of each chapter are not.

Furthermore, a greater emphasis on translation implicitly equates the languages, regardless of context. One New York teacher, introducing second graders to basic German vocabulary in a story on the family, explained the vocabulary by asking questions in English. "Are you a [tson] or a [dɔxtɐ] [a son or a daughter]?" the teacher asked one child, adding, "match the German word with the English word. Let's try." The texts themselves encourage translation by offering chapter questions in English that require German language answers. The emphasis on translation continues through the highest grades. Book three in the series, *Wir Lesen Geschichten aus der Heiligen Schrift* ("We Read Stories from the Holy Scriptures"), has exercises requiring translation from English to German and vice versa.

Implicitly suggesting that standard written German might have a non-scriptural use, the Pathway editors argue in the foreword to *Let's Read German* that "learning any language is more than merely learning to read it" and the text emphasizes the productive use of German in exercises that require students to answer questions and write paragraphs. Nevertheless, translation work and the consequent mixing of languages appears to trouble some communities that fear a growing use of English would lead to a variety of unwelcome changes. A teacher in a small New York settlement, for example, noted that parents were concerned that translation and "writing all these things in English would detract from their German heritage." Another New York teacher argued the need to control the use of English, noting "I guess we want to be different from the world, that's why. English would lead us into more things." The children should only speak English at school, she asserted, but "parents should make them speak just German at home."

In these schools, German is both Pennsylvania German and AHG, and communities count on its continued use to provide a barrier to social intrusion in the wake of growing English dominance. Since AHG is no longer restricted to explicitly religious domains, English is no longer barred from them. For example, as in Swartzentruber schools, teachers begin the day with singing, but in these schools the songs are just as likely to be English Sunday Schools tunes as old German hymns. As one teacher noted, "We choose wholesome material for Christian life. We sing both English and German songs in our schools." Other teachers noted singing mostly in English, while one teacher said that her school sang in German one week and English the next, and that she enjoyed the Gospel songs.

### **German to Emphasize Difference**

As the range of behaviors separating church-community and world narrows, AHG grows in importance as a counter to assimilation and a means of emphasizing difference. In the most progressive Old Order communities, wealth and increased interaction with the non-Old Order world have blurred many of the distinctions between the church-community and the dominant society and made some church-communities even more tolerant of technological innovation and activities often identified by other Old Order groups as "worldly." For example, in the large, homogeneous Old Order settlement in the Elkhart-LaGrange, Indiana, region, many of the children in the settlement now ride bicycles to school and a number of Old Order church members carry cell phones.

Reflecting this growing involvement in the larger, non-Amish world and the growing influence of the dominant society on Old Order life, many of the first graders in the most progressive communities begin school knowing English. When a first grader does not know English, according to one teacher, it makes it "a little tough for them and their teacher! We would explain it in Dutch [Pennsylvania German] too, to make sure they comprehend it." Implying that families *ought* to be using English, even at home, another teacher noted, "We like if our first graders can speak English when they start school, but it's not always the case." As in other communities, "The more older siblings they have to teach them makes a difference." If first graders cannot understand what the teacher is telling them in English, the teacher will use Pennsylvania German to help them, but she will not use it at all with the older students. As one teacher noted, "We use English on the playground too. I only speak German when I need to."

Jakobsh suggests that, for Old Order Mennonites in Ontario, "German is [...] not a language which is valuable in itself, but the traditional language they inherited and which has kept them distinct from the rest of North American society."<sup>26</sup> The "normal Old Order Mennonite in Waterloo County," he suggests further, thinks of German as "just another foreign language." Nevertheless, so long as German serves to separate Old Order from non-Old Order, the language performs a vital role in the church-community. In the Elkhart-LaGrange settlement, for example, German remains the language of church and ritual and is emphasized as such, despite the group's growing reliance on English for intra-community interaction and for activities that the Swartzentruber Amish mark as religious, including school singing and even preaching.

As they come to lead lives very similar to those of their non-Amish neighbors, the most progressive Old Order Amish find in German, both written AHG and spoken Pennsylvania German, evidence of their distance from the world and their identity as Old Order Amish. Thus, teachers consciously emphasize German in the schools. A teacher from Indiana noted, "We want to have German all year long; I think it's more useful than geography." Increasingly engaged in the dominant society, members of the most progressive communities find that German reinforces a line between Old Order and non-Old Order that is often blurred in other areas of daily life.

Indicating its importance to the survival of the church-community, German is given even more room in the curriculum. "We teach German two days a week, usually Tuesday and Friday," noted one teacher. "I feel it's important since that's what we use in church services, so we need to be able to understand what we read." Another asserted that

German is one of the top five reasons that we have our own schools [...] I have German about twice a week. German is almost like the Pennsylvania Dutch we speak, and yet there's a big difference. In our Amish church services, the scripture is read in German and the sermons are a mixture of German, Pennsylvania Dutch, and English in that order. Mostly German. Our songbook, the *Ausbund*, is also German, so German is a big issue in our schools, churches, and homes.

Moreover, children are expected to be able to use AHG, not only passively as

they read, but actively as they translate and speak. Using a combination of Pathway's *Let's Learn German*, Schoolaid's *German Phonics*, Pathway's *Let's Read German* and Schoolaid's *Wir lesen und sprechen Deutsch*, the teachers test children on their productive knowledge of German through vocabulary tests and translation exercises. Unlike their Swartzentruber counterparts, these children learn German grammar and pronunciation. By the time they are in the eighth grade, children are expected to be able to, as the "Foreword" to *Wir Lesen und Sprechen Deutsch* suggests, "take the parts of the characters, speaking in their turn as in real conversation." As the book goes on to assert, "Use and practice make for fluency."

Enninger writes that "AHG school activities are [...] geared to enabling the pupils to gain access to the cultural heritage encoded in AHG and to identifying with it."<sup>27</sup> As in the most conservative church-communities, the use of AHG by the Elkhart-LaGrange and other progressive groups encodes a church separate from the world. Nevertheless, although clearly focusing on the importance of German for religious practice, schools in these most progressive communities teach German in a way that will encourage students to use the language more actively and in a wider range of domains. While perhaps weakening the identification of AHG with religious practice, this approach emphasizes the role AHG plays in establishing and maintaining an Old Order identity quite different from that of their most conservative counterparts.

### **Serving Diverse Groups: When German no longer means Old Order**

In schools that serve diverse Old Order populations, some of which may no longer use German in church services, AHG can no longer unambiguously mark group affiliation, separate church-community from worldly society, or distinguish the sacred from the everyday. Instruction must, thus, divorce academic subject from church practice. The Old Order Mennonite schools in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, are English-dominant. "This is an English country," an experienced teacher announced to beginning teachers at the Old Order Mennonite teachers' meetings, explaining how to respond to parents who might resist the emphasis on English. There is, in fact, just as likely to be resistance to German. One teacher told of a family in her school from an English-speaking church-community that wished the children to do more Bible study in place of German class. "Finally, they left," said the teacher. In another school, a student who "couldn't seem to grasp the German very well" was excused from studying it because, as one of the teachers noted, "[H]e won't be using it at home or church [...]."

In the linguistically diverse Old Order population of Lancaster County, interaction between different Old Order communities requires groups to negotiate language use. For example, as one Old Order Mennonite teacher noted, the Old Order Amish school meetings are often held in German, but the Mennonite meetings, which generally include teachers from the Weaverland Conference ("Horning" Mennonites), are usually held in English.<sup>28</sup> Horning Mennonite teachers in Old Order schools may not be native speakers of German and so may be teaching German as a second language, if they teach it at all. One teacher noted that German singing was for church and added, "We have English in school because of some of my

English-speaking pupils of another denomination.”

As one teacher put it, “We expect our pupils to receive a Christian education according to our standards.” Yet, it is readily acknowledged that “Christian” does not mean “German” and so German can never be taught as something that the children will need to be good church members. Although using the same texts as many Old Order Amish schools, including Schoolaid’s *German Phonics/ Deutsche Lautlehre*, Pathway’s *Let’s Read German*, and Schoolaid’s *Wir Lesen Geschichten aus der heiligen Schrift*, and *Wir lesen und sprechen Deutsch*, the Lancaster Old Order Mennonite schools do not link German instruction to particular church practices. *Schoolteachers’ Signposts*, a guide for Old Order teachers published by Schoolaid, suggests that German will be helpful to the child because “by studying another language the pupil learns many valuable lessons . . . to be able to pick up literature of another language and actually read and understand it, is an enviable accomplishment.”<sup>29</sup>

Helping to reinforce the role of German in the Amish and Mennonite communities that use German in church services, but not imposing a particular religious viewpoint on children from English-speaking Mennonite churches, German instruction helps to prepare children for this diversity. As one teacher noted, “With the mixture of church denominations in our schools, children learn to respect others [and] to respect that different churches have different rules and that’s how it is.” Thus, German language instruction no longer creates difference but rather fosters appreciation of difference.

Having German instruction in schools also sends a message to public school authorities. An “extra subject,” German is part of an expanded curriculum that encompasses far more than the reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and Bible German of the most conservative Old Order Amish schools. Old Order Mennonite educators and parents feel responsible for ensuring that the private schools provide an education comparable to that provided by the public schools. As one mother noted, “We appreciate the parochial school set up. We try as hard as we can to get as close to a high school curriculum as possible. This shows we’re willing to work with the authorities. We strive to push what we can in eight years.” As another put it, “we’re fortunate that the public has let us go this far.” The notion that the state has granted a privilege that must not be abused is evident even on the school report cards, which remind parents that, “In return for the privilege of being granted our Parochial schools,” they should help to ensure that schools have a record “that will be respected by the state as well as having a feeling of satisfaction and sincerity for our own group.”

## Conclusion

Hostetler notes, “schooling in any society is directly related to the value-orientation of a culture [..].”<sup>30</sup> In realizing the core values of their faith and culture, schools in today’s Old Order church-communities demonstrate widely varying patterns of interaction with the world and divergent notions of what it means to be Old Order. Language use and language instruction encode and reinforce these divergent Old Order identities.

In commenting on the looming demise of Pennsylvania German, Huffines asks,

"How important is it to be Pennsylvania German and does Pennsylvania German express that ethnicity?"<sup>31</sup> She goes on to argue that, "The use of Pennsylvania German in sectarian communities is dependent on the use of Amish AHG in worship."<sup>32</sup> The difficulty with this notion, however, is that the Old Orders, understanding the "church" as a redemptive community, are, in a sense, always in church, and so the distinction between "worship" and "non-worship" is not necessarily an easy one to draw.

In Old Order communities, patterns of language use have functioned to define the boundaries of the community and to delineate the borders of sacred and ordinary social domains. For some communities, this has meant that AHG has been given a wider role than that of "ritual language." While the Swartzentruber Amish continue to demonstrate the classic diglossia that defines Pennsylvania German as oral in-group language and restricts AHG to sacred texts and religious activities that use those texts, other church-communities have merged Pennsylvania German and AHG, in spirit if not in fact, and given "German" the responsibility of marking Old Order identity and separating church from non-church. So long as physical separation from the world defines the Old Order Amish church-community, German has a role to play. The nature of that role, shaped by the nature of separation, will be taught in school.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Jakobsh notes in his study of German language instruction in Ontario Old Order Mennonite schools "High German," called here "Amish High German," is not the standard German of today's Germany. Rather it is the German of the Luther Bible, the *Ausbund* (the hymnal used in Amish worship services), and other sixteenth century religious texts. See F. Jakobsh, "German in Old Order Mennonite Schools," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 11 (1993): 162-73. See also M. L. Huffines, "Pennsylvania German: 'Do they love it in their hearts?'" in J. R. Dow, ed. *Language and Ethnicity*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991), 9-22. Huffines distinguishes the archaic standard German of Old Order religious texts from Amish High German, which she describes as "essentially an upper register of Pennsylvania German, infused with formulas and phrases from the archaic standard German" (12). I will refer to both written and spoken forms as Amish High German (AHG).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Enninger and J. Raith, *An Ethnography-of-Communication Approach to Ceremonial Situations. A Study on Communication in Institutionalized Social Contexts: The Old Order Amish Church Service* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1982); M. L. Huffines, "Strategies of Language Maintenance and Ethnic Marking among the Pennsylvania Germans," *Language Sciences* 8 (1986):1-17; M. Loudon, "Bilingualism and Diglossia. The Case of Pennsylvania German," *Leuvense bijdragen* 76 (1987): 17-36; J. R. Dow, "Toward an understanding of some subtle stresses on Language Maintenance among the Old Order Amish of Iowa," *International Journal*

of the *Sociology of Language* 69 (1988):19-31 ; K. M. Johnson-Weiner, "Community Identity and Language Change in North American Anabaptist Communities," *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 2/3 (1998): 375-394; W. Enninger, "Continuity and Innovation in the Bilingual Education Among the Amish," in *The Construction of Knowledge, Learner Autonomy and Related Issues in Foreign Language Learning, Essays in Honour of Dieter Wolff*. ed. B. Missler and U. Multhaup (Sonderdruck: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Jakobsh 1993, 164-65.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Loudon 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Johnson-Weiner 1998, 375-94.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. K. M. Johnson-Weiner, "Group Identity and Language Maintenance: The Survival of Pennsylvania German in Old Order Amish Communities," in *Diachronic Studies on the Languages of the Anabaptists*, eds. K. Burrige and W. Enninger (Bochum, Germany: Universitätsverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1992), 26-42.

<sup>7</sup> *Standards of the Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite Parochial and Vocational Schools of Penna.* (Gordonville, PA; Old Order Book Society, rpt. 2004) p. 13. The *Regulations and Guidelines for Amish Parochial Schools of Indiana* (Middlebury, Indiana, 2002), 10, assert that "English [...] is required in grades three through eight and should be spoken by teacher and pupils at all times while classes are in session, except in German classes."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Although the chance to offer German language instruction was not one of the reasons the Old Orders began to establish their own schools, (cf. Enninger 1999; Johnson-Weiner forthcoming), it was, nevertheless, as Old Order educator Uria R. Byler noted, "an added bonus." A 1961 editorial in *The Blackboard Bulletin*, a magazine for Old Order teachers, noted :

The Amish, as a whole, are losing out in their German. Anyone who doubts this is invited to study the writings of our forefathers of, say, fifty years ago. [...] If our children grow up with very little understanding of German, the use of our mother tongue in our church services will cease to be the blessing it could be. [...] With our own schools and our own Amish teachers, there is no reason whatever why a child cannot be taught to read, write, and speak fluently the German tongue.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. K. M. Johnson-Weiner, "Community Expectations and Second Language Acquisition: English as a Second Language in a Swartzentruber Amish School," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 28 (1993): 107-17.

<sup>12</sup> Generally parents want their children to be six years old by the time school starts or not long after; a child turning six in December, for example, is usually considered too young to start and must wait until the following year. See Johnson-Weiner, 1993, for a more complete description of language instruction.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Johnson-Weiner, 1993, also K. M. Johnson-Weiner (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Young people, aged 17 to marriage, who gather socially to sing "faster" hymns than would ordinarily be sung in church services.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. A. Hostetler, *Amish Society*, third ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Johns

Hopkins University Press, 1993), 228.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Johnson-Weiner, forthcoming.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Jakobsh 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Johnson-Weiner 1993; forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> The Swartzentruber Amish refer to German texts in Roman font as “German written in English.” For more about *Fraktur* script and its use by Anabaptist communities, see the website of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. Abrahams, Ethel Ewert, Hershey, Mary Jane Lederach and Wenger, Carolyn C. (1989), “Fraktur,” *Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. Retrieved 26 May 2005 <<http://www.mhsc.ca/encyclopedia/contents/F6741ME.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> Jakobsh, 171.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Johnson-Weiner 1993.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Enninger 1999.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Jakobsh 1993.

<sup>24</sup> *Let's Learn German* and *Let's Read German* are products of the Pathway Publishing Company in Aylmer, Ontario. Schoolaid Publishing, an Old Order Mennonite press in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, publishes *German Phonics*, which is designed to be used before *Let's Read German*, and *Wir Lesen Geschichten aus der Heiligen Schrift* and *Wir Lesen und Sprechen Deutsch*, which are designed to be books three and four, respectively.

<sup>25</sup> In the foreword to *Let's Read German* (Aylmer, Ontario: Pathway Publishing Company, 1975), Elizabeth Miller writes, “Most of the words introduced and taught are words which are found in the New Testament. After completing this book, the children should be able to read the Gospel of John (the easiest-to-read book of the Bible) with ease and understanding.”

<sup>26</sup> Jakobsh 1993, 171.

<sup>27</sup> Enninger 1999, 222.

<sup>28</sup> The Weaverland Conference Churches, also called Horning Mennonites, no longer use German in worship services, and few Horning children and raised speaking German at home.

<sup>29</sup> *Schoolteachers' Signposts*, (East Earl, PA: Schoolaid Publishing Company, 1985). 96.

<sup>30</sup> J. A. Hostetler, ed. *Conference on Child Socialization*, (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1969), 20.

<sup>31</sup> Huffines 1991, 9-10.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

