



The Amish: A Distinctive Cosmos Serving Well For A Philological Dualism

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Abstract

*T*he success of the Amish in maintaining their ancestral language until now has been well-documented in the related literature, and the arguments about this maintenance sound not to dry up any time soon. At the heart of the existing discussions stand the questions of how and to what extent they have managed to protect their language. The present theoretical commentary serves as an explanatory account of this distinctive issue. To that end, without going into much detail, the author first sets the initial stage by providing a description of the Amish society, a short historical background, and general information on their life, including social structure, religion, education, and language. The author finds this input necessary to foster the understanding of the Amish success of language maintenance in its entirety. Then, she provides the readers with the possible reasons which oil the wheels of this distinguishing success when compared to other minority languages that died in the U.S: their diglossic nature, isolation, religious affinity, resisting mainstream education, special language teaching materials, and the strict stance of both teachers and parents. Furthermore, she draws a paradoxical picture of this success story, in the sense that she provides the readers with some changes in this society that have the potential to turn this success into a failure: interest in non-farming jobs, temptation of higher education, their attempt to make religion manageable, evangelism, curriculum change, and tourism. This dual picture as a whole serves well to analyze the underlying reasons for this distinctive language surviving story. A well-organized combination of different voices from a wide spectrum of sources forms the ground of this commentary, and the author accepts the limitation of the paper, in that it can only give a partial view of what may be the tip of a large iceberg of this success story.

Keywords: the Amish, Pennsylvania Dutch, Old Order Amish, language maintenance, diglossia, bilingualism

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Introduction

A detailed analysis of the related literature shows that there are a number of perspectives that scholars from all over the world use to describe and refer to the Amish. However, it would be wise to start with the description of John A. Hostetler, who was born and raised in an Amish community. Hostetler (1980) defines the Amish as “a church, a community, a spiritual union, a conservative branch of Christianity, a religion, a community whose members practice simple and austere living, a familistic entrepreneuring system, and an adaptive human community” (p. 4). This definition suggests that the Amish are religious people who have tried to resist change via having a simple life distant from all kinds of world conformities. By the familistic entrepreneuring system, Hostetler (1980) refers to the sheer importance they have attached to family relationship, selection of partner for marriage, and child rearing. According to Hostetler and Miller (2005), the partner criteria and the education of new generation are two means that ensure the continuity of particular Amish features in next generations.

As time passes, every society changes, and the Amish are no exception. They have experienced changes in domains such as education, language, economy, society, family, to name just a few. For example, one of these changes is their image, and Hostetler (1980) provides the readers with the changed perceptions of people towards this distinctive society, writing that Americans referred to the Amish as the “relics of the past who live an austere, inflexible life dedicated to inconvenient and archaic customs” (p.3-49). In addition, they were known as resisting modern life conveniences and “American dream of success and progress” (p. 4). However, he attracts the attention to the attitude change towards this small community



in a more positive way. With his own words, “Today the Amish are the unwilling objects of thriving tourist industry on the eastern seaboard. They are revered as hard-working, thrifty people with enormous agrarian stamina, and by some, as islands of sanity in a culture gripped by commercialism and technology run wild” (p. 4).

One of the other areas of change that is the main issue at stake in this paper is their language. The Amish are accepted unique, in the sense that their mother tongue, Pennsylvania Dutch/German, has managed to survive until now (Fuller, 1999; Hurst & McConnell, 2010). There is no shortage of discussion on this issue in the related literature. To the knowledge of the author, the kinds of recent language changes in the Amish have received more research attention than the survival of the language in the available literature. However, in this paper, bearing in mind the features of the Amish, the author seeks answer to the following question that has received relatively little attention: “What are the reasons for the ancestral language survival of the Amish?” With this purpose in mind, she devotes a good deal of space to the analysis of their features which have served well for this widely-known language maintenance. However, the author draws the paradoxical situation of this society by showing that the change of these features has led to language change. Put differently, she attempts to show that the more their distinctive features have changed, the more they have accepted the negative implications of Anglophone hegemony on their mother tongue. In order to help the readers to understand this paradoxical issue in its entirety, the author of the present paper first sets the initial stage by informing them about the birth of the Amish and the basics of their society regarding social parameters, religion, education, and language without going into much detail. For the sake of brevity, the author has to leave out many detailed discussions on the issue. However, it is still hoped that the present paper can throw some light on the issue.

The Amish Cosmos in Its Entirety: The Birth of the Society and Distinctive Culture

The sources on the birth of the Amish society are all concordant, in the sense that their settlement as a separate society is claimed to date back to the European Radical Reformation Movement in the 16th century (Hostetler, 1980; Johnson-Weiner, 2007; Roberts & Gaies, 1990). Originally, the Amish came to the scene with the Radical Reformation movements in the 16th century. Ulrich Zwingli, who was the leader of the Swiss Protestant Church, and his students wanted to form a church separate from the state, because they were not satisfied with the slow church reforms, and different from the church, they were interested in non-resistance, pacifism, non-conformity to the world, adult baptism, and voluntary church



membership. As they secretly baptized themselves, they were called “Anabaptists” meaning “rebaptizer”. As time passed, new branches of this society were born. For example, some were started to be called as Mennonites when Menno Simons, who was a Dutch priest shaped the views of them. Later in 1693, some groups were accused to be conforming to the luxuries of the world by Jacob Amman, who was an Alsatian preacher, and excommunicated, and the conservative branch was referred as the Amish or the Amish Mennonites. Today, the most conservative and less changed branches living in North America are the Old Order Amish and the Old Order Mennonites.

Along similar lines, Hostetler (1980) writes that the Anabaptists, who founded their own church inspired by Martin Luther’s discussion of the established practices of the church, have rejected infant baptism, as infants do not have sin. They support later baptism as the more people learn about good and evil, the more sin enters their world. Anabaptists are referred to as rebaptizer, therefore. In addition to the issue of baptism, they also resisted to take up arms for the sake of obeying the Scripture As these differences were associated with anarchism, they were declared as devil-inspired who deserved to be arrested, tortured, exiled, or killed by the civil authorities. Therefore, they were arrested and banished, which in turn, with the own words of Hurst and McConnell (2010) “created a sceptical and even fearful view of the outside world” (p. 15). They moved to Europe and America to alleviate the problems such as ill-treatment, persecution, and arable land shortages. Most of their leaders were killed. However, today their ideas form serve as basic guidelines for the Amish, and the Amish, who were largely Swiss origin, regard themselves as, with the own words of Hostetler (1980), “Anabaptist” or “Wiedertäfer” (p. 47).

The Amish moved to the America in the early 17000’s in order to practice their version of Christianity freely. They set up different communities in various parts of the country. One of the largest communities is the Old Order Amish of Buchanan Country (Roberts & Gaies, 1990). Nettle (1957) lists the places they have survived in America as Eastern Pennsylvania, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, and some other Midwestern and western states. Hostetler (1980) writes about two immigration periods: the eighteenth century (1727-1770) and nineteenth century (1815-1860). In addition, he attracts the attention to the fact that some lived in various countries of Europe, including Switzerland, Alsace, France, Germany, Holland, Bavaria, Poland, and Russia. However, in Europe they could not survive as a pure and unified cultural group. Geographic distance among communities prevented their close relationship and resulted in estrangement. As physical survival became their primary goal,



rather than reforms, they turned into silent farmers. On the other hand, the New World served well for the Amish as land was suitable for agriculture and the maintenance of close relationship, which in turn enabled the emergence of “distinctive, small, homogeneous, and self-governing communities” (p. 71).

The related literature suggests that there are a number of models that academic community including sociologists has devised to understand the Amish. As a person who has bottom-up views of this close society, Hostetler (1980) partially agrees with the following models: a commonwealth, a sectarian society, a folk society, and a high-context culture. He writes that the Amish are a commonwealth, in the sense that they are both geographically and socially unified, and everybody cares for each other. In the second model, he writes that the Amish are sects who are egalitarian as opposed to hierarchic church. The Amish are reluctant to comply with the authority of religious organizations and leaders. They are not like the usual sects who want others to comply with their own practices. They live the life, rather than communicating it. In his own words, “An Amish person will have no doubt about the basic convictions, his view of the meaning and purpose of life, but he cannot explain it except through the conduct of his life” (p. 8). In the third model, he writes that semi-isolated communities are referred to as folk societies who have primitive and simple life conditions by anthropologists. They resist change, in the sense that “Young people do what the old people did when they were young” (p. 9). Similarly, they attach great importance to being a “Gemeinschaft-like” society (p. 9), which refers to the sense of togetherness, personal leadership rather than institutionalized one, mutual help, customs, economic equality, and religion. For the Amish as a folk society, “shared practical knowledge is more important than science, custom is valued more than critical knowledge, and associations are personal and emotional rather than abstract and categoric” (p. 9). In the fourth model, a high-context culture, he writes that cultural anthropologist refer to the Amish as a high-context culture, which can be described as “one in which people are deeply involved with one another” (p. 18), rather than a low-content culture which is individualistic. And lastly, as a person who was born and raised in an Amish community, Hostetler, names his own voice as the view from the inside. He writes that the Amish are real people who desire to continue the pure and unified nature of their community.

Partially referring to the Amish as a folk society, Hostetler (1980) lists the parameters of such folk society as “distinctiveness, smallness of scale, homogeneous culture patterns, and the strain toward self-sufficiency” (p. 10). The first parameter distinctiveness refers to the fact that with their different lifestyle peculiar to them, they are easily recognizable by others.



While they speak perfect English with others, they tend to use a German dialect among themselves. In addition, the fact that religion and custom, which are normally two separate norms, cohere in their life makes the Amish distinctive. Religion determines their daily life elements such as occupations, friends, travel destinations, hours of work, etc. The issue of distinctiveness is echoed by Roberts and Gaies (1990), who write that their particular religious practices, including adult baptism, their struggle to survive as a secluded society, self-sufficiency, austerity, and their tendency towards agrarian life make them quite distinctive people. The second parameter, smallness of scale, refers to the fact that they form small human groups as they think that estrangement is a natural feature of bigger groups. Therefore, they hold their religious ceremonies at their homes, rather than gathering in a central building. In addition, they form small neighbour units from thirty to forty houses and resist large consolidated schools and farms. The third parameter, homogenous culture patterns, refers to the same of way of thinking and behaving of the Amish. The last parameter, strain toward self-sufficiency, refers to the fact that they can meet their own needs at religious, social and educational level. The place of an Amish woman is her own house where she provides everything needed for survival in her own setting. In addition, the Amish have their own elementary schools, and they take their children out of school early as they believe that after the age of twenty, they cannot get used to working hard as a farmer. They also meet their needs for leisure time in their own societies. As they desire to be self-sufficient, they resist government aid, including farming support, old-age pension, and security. However, they are dependent on others, including local markets, merchants, hospitals, and medical services.

Religion plays a crucial role for the Amish. This reality is best expressed by Horst and McConell (2010), who remark that two pillars of the Amish worldview: living a religious life based in Scripture, and separation from the rest of the world. They organize their life according to an "Ordnung", which is a compilation of expected behaviours, and does and don'ts of them. Hostetler (1980) adds a further dimension to the issue, writing that the Amish are a religious community consisting three segments: settlement, a church district, and the affiliation. A settlement refers to a few Amish families living close to each other. As the name indicates, a church district refers to geographical areas in a settlement in which small churches serves as ceremonial authorities. Lastly, an affiliation is a combination of more than one church district. In the judgement of this paper's author, the fact that the Amish structure their society according to churches best proves the role of religion in their life.



Education is another domain which causes people to regard them quite distinctive. Hostetler and Miller (2005) best describe this situation when they liken the education particularly after 8th grade to “an ice-cold world” (p. 15). As they emphasize persistent farming work over intellect, they do not want their children to go on their formal education after 8th grade. As Hostetler (1980) encapsulates, true education is “the cultivation of humility, simple living, and submission to the will of God” (p. 172) for them. They also fear that after a certain age, their children cannot develop the ability of farming. They also do not want their children to have higher education, as it requires to leave the house and to be away from parental control and to be open to changes.

One of the important areas that make the Amish quite different from other minorities is their language. Frey (1945) attracts attention to the philological trinity existent in their society: the Pennsylvania Dutch/German, High/Standard German, and American English. While the first one is similar to the Palatine German folk speech that they brought from Germany when they moved to America in 1683 for the first time, the second one refers to the dialect this community speaks during the last century and maintained thanks to the attempts of the German press and the Lutheran and Reformed pulpits. However, he calls them as bilingual, rather than trilingual as they have passive knowledge of High German. Yet, he writes that the old Order Amish of Lancaster Country are exception, as they mix three distinctive languages: Amish Pennsylvania Dutch, High German, and Pennsylvania Dutch English. Although the first language is similar to Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, it has some unique characteristics. It is used in everyday conversation. This language does not refer to the language of the Netherlands, and it is oral. Hostetler (1980) summarizes the nature of this language when he writes that Pennsylvania Dutch is neither garbled English nor a corrupted German, but a distinct dialect of German language. The second one is “a hangover from German-preaching days in Pennsylvania churches during the last century” (p. 86) with typical Amish pronunciation. They use it mainly for religious reasons. As church officers are really good at it and provide people with printed prayers, student learn it to some extent in elementary school, people commonly sing hymns, and they sing songs in High German at weddings and funerals, this dialect is used actively. Lastly, they use English in “forced occasions” (p. 86) with the outsiders. These occasions refers to the ones when they have to communicate with people outsiders for tourism, education, written communication, touristic affairs, and economic life. Some other scholars such as Huffines (1997), Loudon (1997) refer to the Amish as bilinguals, in the sense that they actively use two languages: plain Pennsylvania



German and American English. The author of the present paper agrees with these ones, in the sense that the existence of High German on their religious documents does not refer to its active use by the member of the society.

Reasons Serving Well for Their Language Maintenance

As Huffines (1980) writes, when the first Amish immigration to America started in 1683, they brought their German dialect with themselves which is similar to the Franconian dialects of the Rhenish Palatinate with some Alemanic influences. A great number of plain Pennsylvania Germans including the Old Order Amish and Old order Mennonites today use this original dialect among them and teach it to their children as a native tongue although they learn English at school to speak it to outsiders. Less conservative Amish and Mennonites, who are influenced by English culture, use English more frequently in their daily life. However, today less people among non-plain Pennsylvania Germans tend to learn it as a second language, rather than a mother tongue.

Yet, it is worth referring as it has still survived notwithstanding the monolingual language policy of the U. S. The U. S. has been criticized for holding a monarchical tendency toward the minority languages striving to survive on its lands, and leading to the death of a large number of them. English is not the official language of the United States; however, the organization named U.S. English promotes English as the unifying language of the state by legislating restrictive language rights. Although the legislation respects multilingualism, it does not allow citizens to receive service in other languages rather than English (Thomas, 1996). Veltman (1983, cited in Thomas, 1996, p. 134) writes that a great number of minority languages in the United States died out by the second and third generation except for the languages of the Amish and Yiddish-speaking Hassidim, which are isolated communities. Arguing that there is democracy in the roots of the United States, Thomas (1996) is of the opinion that legislating English as the official language of multicultural U.S. is a monarchical tendency which will do harm to language rights, impede access to equal education opportunities, prevent socioeconomic mobility, and make it difficult for some minorities to integrate into American nationality.

A thorough literature review suggests that the success of the Pennsylvania German in surviving when compared to other died immigrant languages in the United States can be attributed to a number of reasons. However, in the judgement of this paper's author, the following six distinctive features of the society are worth mentioning in this success story:



diglossia, the lack of social contact with the surrounding world, religion, resisting mainstream education, language materials, and the stance of both teachers and parents.

The first reason that has been associated with this success story by a number of academic figures is the diglossic nature of the Amish. Huffines (1980) argues that the success of the Pennsylvania German can be claimed to be the natural result of their diglossic nature. The Amish are not only bilinguals but also diglossic, which Richards and Schmidt (2002) describes as follows: “When two languages or language varieties exist side by side in a community and each one is used for different purpose, this is called diglossia” (p. 158). While the one used in official services such as government, the media, education, and religion is called the high (standard) variety, the language used for daily life with family members, friends, etc. is called low-variety (non-prestige). However, the Pennsylvania German is used less among the non-plain communities as it does not have any distinctive and stable function. Additionally, Crystal (2008) points out that in a diglossic situation, the members of the society tend to see the varieties alternative to each other. They learn the high variety in their formal education process, and they use it in churches, radio programmes, literature, etc. On the other hand, they use the low variety at informal setting talking to their family members and relatives. According to Fishman (1972, cited in Garcia, 2009, p. 76), “personality principle” is the societal arrangement of the Old Order Amish bilingualism, which refers to the use of specific languages for particular functions. The Amish uses Pennsylvania German at home, English at school, and High German for their religious responsibilities. Echoing the scholars above, he associates the bilingualism of them with diglossia. The claims above sound reasonable, in that these certain boundaries reinforce the use of ancestral varieties and inhibit the influence of the surrounding language in the marked area. Also, these red lines that have turned into a habitual practice reinforce the settled tendency towards using certain languages for certain needs.

In the Amish case, some linguists argue that diglossia turns into triglossia, which Crystal (2008) describes as “a situation where three varieties or languages are used with distinct functions within a community” (p. 145). Hurst and McConell (2010) remark that the use of Pennsylvania Dutch, or Deitsch in family domain, is what makes the Amish so distinctive. They also use Standard/High German (Hoch Deitsch) for their religious acts while they employ English to read, write, instruct at schools, interact with the outsiders, and engage in business. According to them, the use of three languages is “a powerful conveyor of Amish identity” (p. 16). However, as High German is too difficult to understand and the new



generation tends to use English for different functions including church activities, they do not attach great importance to the learning of this High German. Therefore, it is wise to regard this language maintenance issue as the survival story of Pennsylvania Dutch. As Baker (2001) argues, assigning particular roles for Pennsylvania Amish at home and keeping English separate for school instruction has ensured the continuity of this minority language until now.

The lack of social contact with the surrounding world can be listed as the second factor as a contributor to this success story. As Walker (2010) states, language variation is the natural result of many factors, including social contact. These changes can be experienced in lexicon, syntax, semantic, or the whole language systems. Especially, these kinds of changes associated with the existence and human relations are referred as sociolects. However, the lack of social contact with the surrounding world has avoided variation in the Amish case. This isolation can be attributable to farming and economic activities at home. These all have served well for the Amish to separate themselves from the modern world outside, and, in this way, they have managed to raise their children with the Amish values in the way they were raised (Hostetler, 1980; Kreps, Donnermeyer and Kreps, 1994). As Baker (2001) points out, this isolation has triggered the use of the minority language regularly by its socially and culturally active language speakers. This, in turn, has served well for the protection of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Fishman (2006) agrees with this idea, adding that their rare interaction with the surrounding American world has not gone beyond economic activities, e.g., selling their farming products. As Mckey (2006) remarks, in this isolated world, they have adopted a self-sufficiency policy, in the sense that they have supported their own institutions such as schools, religious units, neighbourhood organization, etc. And this isolation has encouraged them to concentrate on their own mother tongue for communicating in their own world. It is impossible not to agree with Mackey's notion of self-sufficiency, in that people open their doors to others to the extent they need them. As the Amish themselves can meet their "must needs in various domains including food, education, religion, they do not find it necessary to integrate into the surrounding culture. In the end, this ensures much more frequent use of their ancestral languages.

The third factor for this distinguishing language maintenance story has been voiced as religion (Appel & Muysken, 1987; Baker, 2001). As stated earlier, the Ordnung of the church sets certain boundaries for its people so as to keep them away from the influences of the outside world and helps them live a life based on the Scripture. A strong religious faith discourages its people from interacting with the worldly life outside, and this lack of social



contact keep changes in terms of daily life, morality, language, among others, at bay. Making a similar argument, Fishman (2006) writes that the success of the Amish primarily results from the fact that they do not take part in American secular or religious life. Rather, they have adopted a self-sufficiency policy in their local religious units and have developed strong ties with them.

The fourth reason for the survival of the Pennsylvania Dutch is the Amish resistance to mainstream education. As the Amish struggled against the civil authorities, the 1972 Supreme Court decision freed them from compulsory education after eighth grade. The authorities decided not to interfere with the Amish and try to educate them according to the requirements of mainstream education. This exempting has encouraged the Amish to set up their own private schools, which help them protect their own identity through their peculiar education (Hurst & McConell, 2010). The Old Order Amish have been educating their children in their own Old Order parochial private primary schools the number of which are on increase for the last fifty years thanks to their legal struggle with the states of America and the U.S. Supreme Court. The language of instruction is English, and the ultimate aim of these schools is to ensure the survival of religious ideology and their social norms and identity, and maintain their mother tongue Pennsylvania German. In the mid-twentieth century, one-room rural public schools of the Amish were replaced by these private schools, and new subjects were integrated into the school curriculum, which in turn has made the parents feel uneasy as they sense the risk of their children to imitate the mainstream culture. However, still these schools serve well for their rejection of the mainstream education guided by the state (Johnson-Weiner, 2007). The author of the present paper is of the opinion that although it may sound cliché-ridden, training a child in particular contexts with certain hidden curriculums can ensure his/her remaining fixed in these values in the future. In the Amish case, their own education curriculum different from the mainstream ones encourages the new generation not to depart from their everlasting values including their mother tongue.

The fifth reason contributing to the success story of the Pennsylvania German is the distinctive language teaching materials that teach English in a controlled manner. As they need English for their limited relations with the surrounding world, they do not resist English instruction. However, rather than the language teaching materials circulating in the international market, they also use the reprints of some archaic texts that they have taken from their predecessors so as to put borders between their Old Order community and the surrounding English society. Johnson-Weiner (1997) writes that they teach English with



“turn-of-the-century texts” (p. 68) and gives the Pathway Readers series and the McGuffey’s Reader series as two example materials commonly used by the Amish. They have a great number of archaic vocabularies that is not used today. In addition, the visuals of these texts also reflect an English society which does not exist today. Furthermore, these texts which teach grammar with Biblical examples have a “moralistic and God-fearing” (p. 69) tone. The author criticizes these books as they teach modern English with older texts about war, patriotism, politics, and so forth. Although the second series is more modern than the former, their common point is their ultimate aim “to reinforce Amish separation from the world” (p. 73). They attempt to unite generations by showing that important values including their language and truth do not change. In her own words, “Both the McGuffey’s and the Pathway’s texts reinforce this tradition by presenting worlds that do not change. In the McGuffey’s, it is a world that no longer exists. In the Pathway texts, it is the Amish world with its seasonal and generational cycles” (p. 73). These kinds of materials discourage the usage of English and naturally enhance their mother tongue. Johnson-Weiner (2007) summarizes the main strategy of the Amish in avoiding the influence of the surrendering culture when she writes, “Key in protecting children in private schools from the influence of the non-Old Order world is controlling the information they receive” (p. 206). In order to succeed this, they have their own publishing companies that provide them with texts reinforcing their unchanging and distinguishing values. These publishing companies can be listed as the Pathway Publishing Company, the Gordonville Printing Company, the Schoolaid Publishing Company, Study Time, and A Beka and Rod and Staff. On a personal level, both the learning and teaching experiences of this paper’s author substantiate the claim that education materials with their particular ideologies have the potential to influence children at cognitive, emotional, and social levels. Similarly, these distinctive language teaching materials of the Amish with a protective ideology enable them to bring their past including their language to their future.

The last but not the least factor in this survival is the way how teachers and parents approach the issue of dual languages. As Johnson-Weiner (1997) observes in Amish schools, the way how teachers handle these texts is an evidence of their attempts to stay away the English society. Teachers rarely discuss the texts, and students themselves are supposed to read, understand them and spell the words. Instead of dealing with linguistic issues, they emphasize the moral lessons of the texts. In addition, as Johnson-Weiner (2007) writes, “German is the language of the playground, lunchtime, joking- the times when the teacher elates to her



students as community member and not as teacher” (p. 55). Furthermore, teachers switch to German to clarify points and help children in the classroom. Also, children are never encouraged to use English a native speaker. What is more, parents limit the use of English among their children outside the school borders and encourage them to speak their mother tongue. All these limiting attitudes discourage children to substitute Pennsylvania Dutch with English.

As an observer of this secluded society for a long time, Johnson-Weiner (1998) writes that the conservative branches of the Amish such as Old order Amish and Old Order Mennonite associate the tendency towards English with faith erosion and conformity to the modern world outside. What they argue against is not the English language itself, but its serving in place of Pennsylvania Dutch and High German. They reject its use as “the language of intra-community interaction” (p. 383). They fear that its common use will make them replace their traditional values with the worldly values of English. Although it solves their communication problems with the outside world, they still see it as “the language of the outside” (p. 383). For them, “to ‘go to English’ is to want the things of the English world” (p. 383). Therefore, the maintenance of their languages is “not a passive act but an active assertion of identity” (p. 383).

A Paradoxical Picture: Language Change in the Amish on the Way to Lose Their Bilingualism

One of the natural consequences of time is change, and the Amish are no exceptions. Although they are known with their success in the protection of their pure life and mother tongue, a number of factors have given way to some changes in Pennsylvania Dutch. A detailed analysis of the related literature suggests that changes in the above surviving factors have oiled the wheel for changes in the bilingual nature of the Amish society. The patterns of change are due to six reasons: non-farming occupations, the temptation of higher education, the loss of religious affinity the changes in school structure, interest in evangelism, changes in school curriculum, and the effects of tourism.

One of the reasons for the tendency of the Amish to use English more than their mother tongue is the popularity of non-farming jobs among the society. As Kreps et al., 1994 state, the increase in their population has resulted in the scarcity of farm and arable land, which in turn has created a shift to nonfarm occupations, including jobs such as carpenter, labourer within manufacturing companies, and sawmill worker (the three most popular jobs), among



the Amish male. This new tendency may have some profound impact on society's language use. Huffines (1997) echoes them, writing that the Amish have to find occupations rather than farming, and their extensive cottage industries and new marketing strategies require them to use English more frequently, rather than their mother tongue. It is impossible not to agree with these claims, in the sense that the frequency of mother tongue use naturally falls when the male population that have left their society for the sake of their new jobs do not speak it anymore in the surrounding world.

The temptation of higher education also leads to the turning of the society into a monolingual one. As Kreps et al. (1994) remark, the formal education which stops at 8th grade may go on at vocational level and "take Amish males further away from their agrarian roots" (p. 718). When the members go outside of the society, they no longer use their mother tongue, which may result in the decrease of its active use.

The weakening of their religious affinity can be listed as another factor that forms the ground of this language decrease. Huffines (1997) writes that the Amish limit German to their religious acts. This, in turn, makes it difficult to understand their religion and discourages them to be loyal to their religion. The ones who are interested in the continuation of this affinity tend to replace it with English. This in turn reduces the frequency of their ancestral language use.

Another reason for the frequent use of English rather than Pennsylvania Dutch or High German is their interest in evangelism. Hostetler (1980) associates this interest with the Amish group identity as a pattern of change. However, Johnson-Weiner (1998) writes that some groups of Amish, for example, the Beachy Amish, tend to see the shift to English as "not assimilation to the dominant society but rather the active assertion of spiritual mission" (p. 385) for evangelism. English serves well for them in order to bring the other nations to salvation. Therefore, as Johnson-Weiner (1998) sums up, while the worries of the Old Orders has resulted in "language maintenance", the religious aims of the Beachy churches and the new Orders has brought about "language shift" (p. 390). The author of the present paper is of the opinion that their desire to convert others to their version of Christianity requires them to make it more manageable and applicable to everybody. This in turn requires the use of a common language during their public preaching, rather than their mother tongue.

Changes in school curriculum also have the potential to result in language change. Roberts and Gaies (1990) write that when the society fiercely resisted sending their children to the



schools in towns in 1965, they were excluded from mainstream education. However, in 1967, the Act which allowed the education of immigrant children in their own rural schools staffed by non-Amish teachers coming from public schools was passed, because these children have been seen as lacking equal education opportunities. Therefore, services for Limited English Proficient (LEP) children including English as a Second Language (ESL) or bilingual education have been provided for minority communities since the Supreme Court's decision in 1974 that minority children are limited as they lack equal mainstream education opportunities. Richards and Schmidt (2002) write that the term ELP refers to "a minority student in an English speaking country, whose English language proficiency is not at the level of native speakers of English" (p. 309). Therefore, they need special instruction to keep up with the pace of the ones tending regular schools. However, the issue for the Amish community was brought to life in 1988-89 when the language proficiency of the students attending three rural schools was assessed thanks to the attempts of a superintendent. When 91% of the students were found having limited language proficiency, these kinds of language services started to be provided for the community. These services "include diagnostic testing, recommendations on materials adaptation and purchase, in-service workshops for the teachers, and consultation on planning for the future" (p. 6). The administrators and all the non-Amish teachers have been positive about these services. However, the society still has worries about the impacts of these curriculum changes on their pure life and language.

In order to alleviate their worries, Roberts and Gaies (1990) argue that the instructional design model titled as Sheltered English (SE) serves best for them. Richards and Schmidt (2002) sum up the nature of SE when they describe it as "an approach to the teaching of second language students based on the Canadian model of immersion education, in which content is taught in English and made comprehensible to the students by special instructional techniques" (p. 483). The materials are all in English and as there are only teachers as native speakers in the classroom, students are in an advantageous situation and they do not have to compete with native speakers. Visual, simple language and adapted materials are used to make everything much more comprehensible. However, Richards and Gaies (1990) see the Amish version of SE different from the usual instructional model in three ways. First, the Amish students are physically separated from their American peers. And second, materials are adapted not only for language but also for content. Most importantly, the goals are different. With their own words, "students in sheltered English programs are to be mainstreamed as soon as possible, while the Amish intend to remain apart" (p. 8). However, in the judgement of this paper's



author, as the aim of these kinds of programmes is to develop their English language literacy, they are deeply exposed to English, rather than Pennsylvania Dutch, and naturally encouraged to extend its use outside the school borders.

In addition to all the above reasons, tourism as one of the forced situations can also oil the wheel for change in a number of domains (Hostetler, 1980). As tourists use English, which the language of the surrendering world, the Amish have to switch to it as a contact language. However, this may decrease the frequency of their mother tongue use.

The related literature shows that all these factors have started to result in language change in Pennsylvania German. Huffines (1997) writes that today the Amish experiences two types of linguistic change in their minority languages: linguistic transference from English to Pennsylvania German, and selective displacement of German and Pennsylvania German by English. They borrow common everyday items, rather than technical ones and grammatical operators such as conjunctions “but, unless, because”, and this results in word order change in Pennsylvania German subordinate clauses. Huffines (1997) accepts the importance of borrowing in helping languages “stay current and remain productive” (p. 54); however, what worries him is the fact that the Amish tend to use them with English grammatical context, rather than integrate them into their native tongue structure. In addition, there have occurred changes in verb system. The Amish, influenced by the progressive tense of English, uses a similar structure to this tense: “sei+am+the infinitive of the main verb”. The Amish also extend the use of their auxiliary verb “duh” based on the English “do” and use it to express negation and form questions. Furthermore, they use some structures such as “als” which should be used for past actions to express present situations. They also change the usual structure of sentences. For example, replicating English, the Amish put the past participle close to the auxiliary verb. In addition, they tend to use different structures to express infinitive.

Apart from all these influences at vocabulary, morphology, and syntax levels, Huffines (1997) is of the opinion that Pennsylvania German is also influenced by English phonologically, in the sense that the Amish have adopted the American /r/. However, Loudon (1997) partially agrees with Huffines (1997), writing that the lexicon and syntax of the Pennsylvania German have experienced change; however, its phonology and word order have not been influenced by American English. It has borrowed social and technological words from English. The syntactic changes refer to three cases dative case, tense/aspect, and infinitives. However, word



order has not changed. In the similar vein of thought, in a comparative study conducted with eighteen native speakers of Pennsylvania German and twenty Standard German-English bilinguals living in the U.S., Fuller (1999) found structural convergence toward English both in past participle forms and separable prefix verbs.

A number of figures have addressed the types of linguistic changes in the Pennsylvania Dutch; however, as the focal concern of the present paper is the factors that have helped language maintenance, the author has to leave out these linguistic details. So far the present paper has dealt with the distinctive features of the Amish society that have served well for the survival of Pennsylvania Dutch until now. She has also provided the readers with some changing elements which have oiled the wheel of bilingualism loss in this society. The elements at the both ends of this continuum are hoped to serve well for the understanding of underlying reasons for this success story.

Conclusion

As one of the well-known sacred societies, the Amish have tried to refrain from melting in the American pot by protecting their own identity since their movement to America. They have a desire to keep the things related to their past alive in their future. One of these elements symbolizing their distinctive identity is their mother tongue, Pennsylvania Dutch. As explained above, factors such as their diglossic nature, isolation, religion, self-efficacy in education, and the strict attitudes of both teachers and parents have shielded their language from the code of the surrounding world. However, in time, some changes in their language have occurred due to their new interests in surviving economically with non-occupation jobs, higher education, understandable version of religion via English, evangelism, new school curriculum, and tourism. Still, today the Amish with their ancestral language Pennsylvania Dutch stand as one of the symbols of resistance to Anglo-American hegemony.



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