Dutchified English in an Ohio Mennonite Community

Master’s Thesis

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By

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Abstract

This thesis compares the English spoken by a Beachy Amish-Mennonite church in Coshocton County Ohio with the English of Non-Mennonites in the same region. Although there is no previous research on this or any nearby Mennonite communities, previous research on the dialects of English spoken by Amish communities in the US suggests that differences from the regional standard are influenced by deliberate border maintenance, primacy of language in expressing ethnic identity, and interference from Pennsylvania German, known to speakers as “Dutchified English”. However, the wealth of diversity in related ethnic minority groups has not been tapped, and very little research has examined the English of Mennonites who generally choose a less conservative, and consequently more complex, balance between separation from and engagement with the outside world.

The variables I focus on are initial th-stopping, final obstruent devoicing, and the low back vowel merger. The first two variables are documented for Amish English and various German bilingual communities. Th-stopping is also socially salient, and is associated with the more religiously orthodox groups in Holmes County, from which the Coshocton community distinguishes itself.

I collected production and perception data from ten speakers in the Mennonite Church community and five non-Mennonite speakers from the same region, and I present here my findings of the use of th-stopping and final consonant devoicing, both of which are attested although neither are used categorically, and the low back merger, which is attested categorically in all Non-Mennonites, but in only one Mennonite speaker.

This research is the first step in the description of Mennonite English in Ohio, and opens several avenues for further comparison. The perceptual data also has theoretical implications for the role of community identity and border maintenance in the way these Mennonites position themselves between their non-plain neighbors and the more religiously and culturally conservative Holmes county communities.
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Vita

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“Dutchified” English refers to varieties of English influenced by contact with Pennsylvania Dutch, also known as Pennsylvania German (PG), a dialect deriving from Middle High German of the Palatinate and found mainly in Pennsylvania and the Midwest United States (Ness, 1995). While historically it has been spoken by both secular and Sectarian Pennsylvania Germans, use among secular speakers has dwindled to limited communities in Pennsylvania, whose variety of Dutchified English is nearing obsolescence (Anderson, 2014). This article describes a study done on the Dutchified English of a Mennonite community in Central Ohio.

Previous research on English spoken in sectarian Pennsylvania Dutch communities, including Mennonites and Amish, shows conflicting accounts of PG interference. This lack of consensus is unsurprising given the diversity among sectarian communities. Many sectarian communities maintain the use of Pennsylvania German as their L1 and use English in limited contexts, including school and interactions with monolingual English speakers, while other communities have undergone language shift entirely to English. Between these outer bounds there exist communities at just about every intermediate point. Previous research has been conducted mainly among the more conservative (and most numerous) affiliations of Old Order Amish who have the least amount of contact with the surrounding non-Pennsylvania Germans, while
relatively little has been done on the English of Mennonites, who generally choose a less conservative, and consequently more complex, balance between separation from and engagement with the outside world.

Sectarian Pennsylvania Germans are generally considered a rural ethno-religious group that is organized geographically and socially primarily by church district. Each church district varies in its religious affiliation and, although it may belong to a regional or national conference, each community negotiates its own practices to some extent. For this reason, the current study is confined to one particular church of Beachy Amish-Mennonites in Coshocton County and members of the geographically overlapping non-Mennonite community.

The basic research questions explored in this study are as follows:

1. Do members of the Coshocton County Beachy Amish-Mennonites use features that distinguish their English from that spoken by their Non-Mennonite neighbors?
2. If so, what features do they use that distinguish them?
3. What social perceptions are associated with those features?

In order to answer these questions, I focus on three variables: initial $\delta$-stopping, final obstruent devoicing, and the low back merger, also known as the caught-cot merger. The first two variables are documented for Amish English and various German bilingual communities. $\delta$-stopping is socially salient, and is associated with the more religiously orthodox groups in Holmes County, from which the Coshocton community distinguishes itself.
In the following chapters, I give a brief account to the origin, beliefs, and practices of the Beachy Amish-Mennonites. Chapter two discusses geographical implications for the community in Coshocton County. In chapter three, I outline previous research that informs the current study. Chapter four describes the methodology, including participant recruitment. Chapter five gives a more in-depth introduction to the variables used for comparison and their phonetic analyses. Chapter six presents the results for the phonetic production portion of the research, and section seven discusses the attitudes expressed by participants toward Dutchified English. Chapter eight discusses the study’s theoretical implications and how it can be integrated into other bodies of research on ethnically based language varieties. Finally, I conclude with a brief summary of key findings and future avenues of inquiry.
Chapter 2. Beachy Amish-Mennonites

The Beachy Amish-Mennonites are an affiliation of the Mennonite sect of Anabaptism, a Christian tradition originating in the reformation in the 16th century in Southern Germany, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Anabaptism also encompasses the more widely known and studied Amish, as well as Brethren and Hutterites. All Anabaptists have since emigrated out of Europe and the vast majority of their direct descendants now reside in the Americas, including the US, Canada, and South America, although other communities have emerged throughout the world. Through the process of church schisms, both Amish and Mennonite affiliations have become enormously diverse and encompass a range of smaller affiliations.

However, in the American Midwest today, the Amish and Mennonite communities are still richly intertwined. There is movement between churches at the levels of groups, families, and individuals. Unlike the more conservative Old and New Order Mennonites, Beachy Amish-Mennonites are evangelical and allow, sometimes even encouraging, individuals not born to the faith to convert and become members of the church, although this remains relatively rare. It is much more common to have families or individuals who were born Amish choose to join a Beachy Amish-Mennonite Church later in life.
Each church community has its own statement of purpose regarding particular practices and beliefs. However, there are core values that are common across Beachy Amish-Mennonite church communities. These include adult baptism, after which the individual becomes a full member of the church, some degree of separation from the world, privileging the church community as the primary social unit rather than the individual, and engagement in an outreach program aimed at non-Christians. Practices that set Beachy Amish-Mennonites apart from Mainstream American society include distinctive dress, including covering of women; forgoing the use of television, radio, or internet in the home; and a Capella, congregational singing of hymns in church. They are distinct from many of the more populous Anabaptist affiliations in the Midwest in that they are car-driving rather than buggy-driving, have electricity and phones in their homes, and perform outreach work outside of the community.

2.2. Pennsylvania German

The use of Pennsylvania German is both a part of the Anabaptist heritage and an important tool for maintaining the boundary between the church community and mainstream society. While not all Beachy Amish-Mennonite communities maintain the use of PG, the Coshocton County church has a congregation of mostly L1 PG speakers. According to participants, only one or two families, out of a congregation of approximately 200 individuals, do not speak PG. For the sake of those families, however, all church services are held in English.

The domains of use for PG in this community include situations where all interlocutors speak PG and belong to the Anabaptist community, such as home, certain
work sites, and social functions wherein all participants are PG speakers. English domains include school, even for those who attended early childhood education in Amish private schools, when working with Non-Anabaptist coworkers or customers, and at church. My participants were split on the amount of English used in the home. One family claimed to use English and PG equally even when they were home as a family, while another family stated that they rarely use English when it is just them at home. This is unique in many of the Amish communities, who maintain a stable diglossic linguistic system, wherein English is limited in the home, and used in established social environments only.

Although all Anabaptist communities practice constant renegotiation of boundaries with the outside world, this PG use illustrates the relative complexity of the Coshocton Church’s boundary maintenance. Whereas more conservative communities have more ridged, established social boundaries, this community, like many of the Mennonite churches, demonstrates less consensus, and may be in a state of flux. Such lack of consensus often leads to church schisms, if they become a point of contention between members of the church. While some of my participants expressed concern for the increase in English borrowing in PG and that some children in the church do not speak PG, none of them felt that this was something that needed to be directly addressed in the church. For now it is being allowed to progress naturally.
Chapter 3. Holmes County

The Coshocton County church community is situated directly south of Holmes County, which is home to the largest settlement of Amish and Mennonites in the world. Although census reports only account for the Amish population, Holmes County was estimated in 2012 to be nearly 42% Amish, and represent the center of an Amish settlement of 36,000. It is also home to many affiliations of Mennonites, including Beachy Amish-Mennonites, Old and New Order Mennonites, and Mainstream Mennonites. Although there is a tourist industry also located in Holmes County, centered around Berlin and Walnut Creek, these centers act to draw outsiders away from the everyday life of the Amish and Mennonites who believe in separation.

Holmes County thus serves as a cultural focal point for Amish and Mennonites throughout Ohio, including those in the Coshocton County Beachy Amish-Mennonite church. And although there is an incredible amount of diversity amongst the Anabaptists there, from the Schwartzentruber Amish who have among the most conservative practices, such as prohibiting the use of indoor plumbing or riding in cars, to the Mainstream Mennonites, who are nearly indistinguishable in appearance from non-Anabaptists, the reference to those “up in Holmes County” is often used to suggest more conservative, rigid practices and beliefs.
The Coshocton County church community seems to be situated on the outer boundary of the Holmes County settlement, both geographically and ideologically. At the same time, they are much more conservative in their practices than many mainstream Mennonite denominations.

The Coshocton County Beachy Amish-Mennonites are car driving, plain-dressed Mennonites who believe in and practice missionary work, use electricity and phones in their homes, but do not have television or radio. Although many leave school after the eighth grade, others may choose to continue into high school and even college. Unlike most other Mennonites, they maintain the use of PG as their first language.
Chapter 4. Previous Research

Dutchified English is best understood as a set of features that originate from contact between PG and some dialect of American English. Benor’s (2010) ethnolinguistic repertoire theory offers a useful framework for understanding usage patterns of Dutchified English. Defined as a “fluid set of linguistic resources that members of an ethnic group may use variably as they index their ethnic identity” (160), the ethnolinguistic repertoire theory posits a set of distinct features which speakers are able to make use of variably. Such a theory’s primary theoretical advantage in the case of Dutchified English is its ability to account for intra-speaker variation. The relevant features act as a linguistic toolkit, which speakers make use of differently in different contexts. Speakers have access to both the ethnically marked and standard (or regional) features, and have a degree of agency in choosing which feature to use.

Benor applies this theoretical construct to language use among Jewish Americans to account for common contradictions that occur in the descriptions of ‘ethnolects’, including inter and intra group variation, out-group use, and delineation of the ethnic group and ‘ethnolect’. These same problems arise in the use of Dutchified
English, where there is considerable variation in the use of particular features, frequency of use, and social meaning associated with their use between individuals, families, communities, affiliations, and between secular and sectarian speakers. We use the linguistic repertoire construct to interpret the findings of this particular study.

However, most previous research refers either to Dutchified English as an ethnolect, or to a variety of ‘Amish English’. Anderson (2014) describes the “unraveling” of Pennsylvania Dutchified English, which she describes as a variety of Dutchified English spoken by secular Pennsylvania Germans in south Central Pennsylvania which is quickly approaching extinction. The most salient feature, defined linguistically and socially, is obstruent devoicing, a feature which has been simplified in younger generations, and now extends beyond the German devoicing in the syllable final environments to obstruent devoicing in all environments except word-initially or at the onset of a stressed syllable. According to Anderson, this feature shows unraveling in three ways, different obstruents are being devoiced, the frequency with which individuals devoice is decreasing generationally, and the phonological constraints of devoicing are changing, in that they now devoice in most environments. Use of the ethnolinguistic repertoire construct would allow for a much simpler understanding of the unraveling that Anderson describes. The phonetic rules associated with the features are simplifying by becoming broader and affecting more phonemes, they are also changing in their social meaning and therefore being utilized less frequently and by fewer speakers. Rather than characterizing the use of Dutchified features as code switching or code mixing, Secular Pennsylvania Germans are using the linguistic repertoire less frequently and to achieve different goals than those of previous speakers.
Previous research on the English spoken by Amish communities in the US suggests that differences from the regional standard are influenced by a number of factors, including deliberate border maintenance, primacy of language in expressing ethnic identity, and interference from Pennsylvania German. Early research on English spoken by Amish describes a very heavily influenced English resulting from incomplete English competency. Frey (1945) describes Amish English as “American English built on a framework of Pennsylvania Dutch phonemic patterns and interjected continually with whole or part loan-translations from the dialect” (86).

Later research characterized Amish English as being nearly indistinguishable from regional Standard English except in informal settings when speakers would exhibit a degree of “interference” from PG (Raif 1980; Huffines 1982; Enninger, 1985, 1987). They all refer to what is called an ‘Interference Hierarchy’, which includes 12 features in an ordered ranking, for which the lowest ranked feature is most common, and where any higher feature is present, one should expect to find all lower features as well. As shown in Figure 1, the lowest ranked feature is final obstruent devoicing. The highest is the pronunciation of initial /θ/ as /s/. So if a person produced the /θ/→[s] feature is likely to also use all of the other features, down to final obstruent devoicing. This can be easily applied to the linguistic repertoire theoretical construct, and may give us an idea of what to expect in Dutchified English. We might find that the higher the position on the hierarchy, the more frequently the feature is used, and the more widespread it is across individuals.
Huffines (1982) attributes PG features in English to L1 interference in older generations who have not achieved English fluency, and in younger, bilingual PG English speakers as well as monolingual English speakers, to construction of ethnic identity. She utilizes Giles’ (1987) ethnolinguistic boundary model to explain intergenerational variation and variation between secular and sectarian groups. She found that among fluent English speakers, Mennonite and secular Pennsylvania Germans exhibited more interference because they used language as a primary mode of expressing their ethnic identity, whereas more conservative, Amish speakers had hard non-linguistic boundaries such as plain dress and horse-and-buggies.
Many Mennonite communities have undergone language shift entirely to English and abandoned PG. Johnson-Weiner (1998) highlights the importance of the church community in making choices of language maintenance or shift. According to her, a community chooses to either use PG in order to mark themselves as Old Order Amish or Mennonite and create a boundary between themselves and outsiders, or actively choose to privilege evangelicalism and reject Old Order practice. However, many communities choose a middle path, and how they choose to navigate that path showcases the subtleties of ethnic identity. The Coshocton County Mennonites walk the middle path by maintaining bilingualism even in the youngest speakers long after most other Mennonite churches have shifted to English, while losing the ridged domains of use, borrowing lexical items in both directions, and exhibiting features of Dutchified English non-categorically.
Chapter 5. Methodology

The current study compares the phonetic output and qualitative attitudinal data from two groups: The Beachy Amish-Mennonite church district in Coshocton County, Ohio and Non-Mennonites living co-territorially in the same set of townships. The purpose of this comparison is to determine if features of Mennonite English are part of the regional dialect rather than characteristic of Mennonite English. This is particularly important because historical migration patterns in the area include a large number of migrants of German ancestry.

As a researcher, gaining access to Mennonite communities raises several practical and ethical concerns. Because some degree of separatism is valued in most Mennonite communities, and many families may be uncomfortable with aspects of research such as having strangers in their home and around children, being recorded, being asked about problems within their community by an outsider, and having to sign legalistic forms such as consent forms, it is necessary to have either a previously cultivated relationship of trust in the community or an informant who can direct you in appropriate behavior and vouch for you. I was extremely lucky to have an informant who is both a Mennonite himself and a sociologist. He was able to connect me to families who were willing to participate and passed my contact information along to them. And because this informant was, for lack of a better term, a pretty popular guy, there was some level of trust established through him. I was thus able to schedule
meetings at the participants’ home and interview all family members over the age of 18. All interviews with Mennonites were conducted in February of 2014. I received an exemption from requiring written consent forms and received verbal consent for voice recording.

I collected data from 10 participants, collected during 4 separate interviews and representing 4 families: two women of middle age interviewed on their own, and two sets of parents with adult children.

The Mennonite participants have roots which quite recently extend into Holmes County. Some members were born Amish or had parents who were born Amish and who lived in the Sugar Creek area of Holmes County. All Mennonite participants say that Pennsylvania German is their first language and that they either learned English at the same time or when they began school. All claimed equal or near equal fluency in both languages. This varied slightly based on their chosen career. For example, the young female recently spent time teaching out of state, where she used only English, but is now working only in the home and rarely uses English. Others claimed that they use an equal amount of PG and English in the home. This group has an extremely tight social network. Most of their social interaction is with others in their church, with only occasional shared social events with other Mennonite churches or the local Non-Mennonite Church. Four interact daily with Non-Mennonite customers at their place of employment.

The Non-Mennonites represent a very different type of group. Because it is a rural area, and I did not have an inside informant among the local Non-Mennonites, I
had to approach people working or participating in community activities in the nearby businesses, which were few and far between. I collected data from five individuals: one working at the local town hall, three from a genealogy club meeting, and one from a local library. All Non-Mennonite participants have sporadic contact with the Mennonites, either as customers or through combined church events. Although none claimed to have local Mennonite or Amish ancestry, one woman does have a grandmother of Swiss Amish decent. All Non-Mennonite participants are monolingual English speakers. Interviews were conducted between February and April of 2014.

Because the Non-Mennonite group is chiefly defined by geography and lack of belonging to the Mennonite church, they make up a fundamentally different type of social group. Their social networks are very loose. Two of the participants from the genealogy club meeting are sisters, but the rest are unrelated and do not attend the same church. The Town Hall worker and Librarian do not know any of the other participants.

Once participants were recruited, I asked them to participate in three tasks. They were first asked to read a word list containing the targeted variables, then to read a brief reading passage, and finally to engage in an informational interview. The interview portion had two parts, the first intended to collect demographic data, language background, as well as information about the participant’s social network, and the second part about their perceptions and attitudes about their community in relation to other nearby communities. I recorded them using a Roland R009HR high resolution recording device. Recording conditions varied slightly between locations, due to echoing
concrete floors, children talking, or other background noises. Where background noise inhibited acoustic analysis the sample was thrown out. I describe each of the interview steps in further detail in the following sections.

5.2 Word List

The word list consists of 78 words, containing three variables, which are discussed in greater detail in the following section: initial δ-stopping, final devoicing of stops and affricates, and the low back merger. There were also filler words that contained additional variables of possible interest, but for the purposes of this thesis, we do not look at any of those further. Each participant was asked to read the word list at a comfortable pace, repeating each word twice.

5.3 Reading Passage

The reading passage is a 189-word paragraph. It is a short story about a son and his father fishing before the son leaves for college. It contains between 13 and 15 possible tokens of each variable. The environment predicted to trigger δ-stopping is represented by 15 tokens, but there is some word repetition, particularly in the words “the”, “their”, and “them”, which are all repeated at least once. However, this repetition provides the opportunity to look at potential cross lexical interaction. The participants are asked to read the passage at whatever pace is comfortable for them.

5.4 Interview

The first part of the interview portion is intended to collect general demographic information regarding the participant’s family and language background,
education, employment, and social network. To that end, I questioned them regarding what language they spoke at home as children, how often they use English and PG in their daily lives, who goes to their church, who they socialize with outside of work, what towns they have lived in, what type of schools they go to or have gone to, if those schools were mostly Mennonite, mostly Non-Mennonite, or mostly Amish, and what other languages they know. One family spent some time as missionaries in Haiti, and all members speak some Haitian Creole. Two of the parents were born Amish and attended Amish schools as children. None claimed to socialize with Non-Mennonites regularly outside of work.

The second portion of the interview was aimed at more subjective information. In the case of the Mennonite families interviewed, I did this portion as a group. Therefore eight of the ten Mennonite participants did it as a group. None of the Non-Mennonites did a group interview, due to the circumstances of recruitment.

Every effort was made to engage all participants in the group interviews, although the fathers did tend to dominate the discussion. The motivation for doing group interviews was to create a more relaxed environment for more informal speech and candid opinions. This seems to have been successful in the latter goals, but the interview portion did not prove a good source of phonetic data, due to simultaneous speech, background noise, and sensitivity of the recording device. Therefore only the reading passage and word list was used for formal phonetic analysis.

The questions in the second portion of the interview centered around the participants’ perception of the Mennonite community in relation to the other
Mennonite church districts nearby, the Non-Mennonite community, and the nearby Amish communities. The following is a sample of the questions that were asked during this session regarding interaction with other communities:

a. In what situations do Mennonites and English (Non-Mennonites) interact around here?

b. Do Amish live around here? Do Amish and Mennonites interact much? In what situations?

c. How is your Mennonite community different from other Mennonite communities?

Other questions sought to clarify the participants’ conception of terms like “community” and how they perceived people around them to fit into it.

d. Is the Mennonite community separate from the English (Non-Mennonite) community or do you consider them part of the same community?

In what ways are they separate and in what ways are they the same community?

e. Do you wish they were more or less separate, or is it ok the way it is?

I then began asking question directly about language use. Although all participants knew that I was there as a linguistic researcher, and had clearly just done a linguistic centered task in reading the word list and reading passage, I wanted to give them the opportunity to bring up linguistic differences on their own before directly asking.

f. Do Mennonites in your community sound any different (in English) than the Non-Mennonites? How so? What characteristics distinguish between them?

g. Do Mennonites in your community speak differently than other Mennonites in other churches? How so? Which characteristics distinguish between them?
And finally, I asked them about change in their community:

h. During your lifetime, have you seen Mennonite practices change? How so? Are they for the better or for the worse?

i. Do you think the English spoken by younger Mennonites is different from the English spoken by older people?

j. During your lifetime, have you noticed the English spoken by Mennonites change? For the better or for the worse, or neither?

Altogether, this three part process took about 25 to 40 minutes for families, and about 15 to 20 for individuals. I also asked follow-up questions to get further clarification. I tried to keep this process as informal as possible.

5.5 Variables

Phonetic production data was collected for three variables: final obstruent devoicing, initial ð-stopping, and the low back vowel merger. Each differs in saliency and previous research suggests may differ by region of Dutchified English.

Obstruent devoicing is considered the most salient feature of Pennsylvania Dutchified English. Anderson (2014) describes it as the feature most quickly referenced when mimicking a Dutchified accent. It is also commodified to some degree. The humorous guide book titled “How to speak Dutchified English: An “Inwaluble” Introduction to an “Enchoyable” Accent of the “Inklish Lankwitch”” has four examples in the title alone. Although Pennsylvania Dutchified English devoicing has spread to
obstruents in all environments, this analysis is limited to devoicing in word final position as predicted on the interference hierarchy.

Final obstruent devoicing is also the feature at the lowest level of the interference hierarchy (Raif 1980, Huffine 1982, Enninger 1985), leading one to expect it to appear in any individual who exhibits any sign of PG interference.

Despite its high social saliency in Pennsylvania and inclusion in nearly all previous research on Amish English or Dutchified English, none of my participants, nor any other Pennsylvania Germans I spoke to before beginning formal research, including New Order Amish men in Holmes County, ever mentioned this as an example of distinct Dutchified speech.

For the purposes of analysis, devoicing is treated as dichotomous, although acoustically the obstruents are only partially devoiced. Anderson (2014) demonstrates that when devoicing is socially salient, speakers treat obstruents as either voiced, unvoiced, or devoiced, without conscious distinctions between partial and full devoicing. As in Pennsylvania German (Kopp, 1999), devoiced obstruents still exhibit less voicing than that of voiced obstruent and more than phonemically unvoiced obstruents.

Plosives /d/, /g/, and the affricate /dʒ/ were categorized as devoiced based on spectrographic and wave form analysis in PRAAT (Boersma & Weenink, 2011), as shown in figure 2. The length of glottal pulsing during consonant closure, voicing bar, vowel length, as well as impressionistic determination were used to label each word final obstruent after sound clips were randomized to reduce expectation bias.
Although initial ð-stopping is not referenced in previous research on Amish English, or secular Dutchified English, with the exception of Thomas (2006), who describes its use in the English of Swiss Amish in Northern Indiana, it appears to be highly salient in Coshocton County Mennonites. It was, without exception, the feature referenced, if any, that distinguishes Amish and Mennonite English from the regional Standard English. As one Mennonite woman states, “Some would tend to say “dis” and “dat” instead of “this” and “that”. That’s something my Dad, he didn’t really care for... but I think it’s a little bit sloppy”. Likewise, it is also the most common feature referenced by the Non-Mennonites. For example, one Non-Mennonite woman says, “A lot of times I will pick up that they say “dis and “dat”. They’ll substitute a “d” for a “th””. The Non-Mennonites mentioned a couple other features, such as the perception that Mennonites sound Canadian or Minnesotan, which is likely related to Canadian-like
raised vowels. They also mentioned syntactic and lexical features that tend to be stereotypical examples such as “make the door shut” rather than “shut the door”.

Interestingly, although it is never directly referenced as a feature of Pennsylvania Dutchified English, it does appear in written Dutchified English in Gate’s humorous guidebook. In a Dutchified rendition of “Chulus Ceasar” it reads, “De efil dat men do liffs afder dem; De goot iss oft interrd viss dare bontz” (Gates, 1987, p75).

D-stopping was also categorized dichotomously as either stopped or not stopped. This was done impressionistically and by presence or absence of a visible stop burst in the spectrogram, as shown in figure 3. Sound clips were again randomized to reduce expectation bias.

![Figure 3. Highlighted area shows the initial /ð/ of the word “their”](image)

The low back merger represents a very different relationship between the English spoken by Mennonites and that of the surrounding non-Mennonites. While this
merger is widespread across much of North America, it remains incomplete and in a transitional stage in the midland dialect region, including central Ohio (Labov, Ash, and Boberg, 2008). According to the Atlas of North American English, the pronunciation of COT and CAUGHT is neither consistently merged nor consistently distinct in the Midlands.

An analysis of the low-back merger helps to determine whether the Mennonites are engaging in regional sound change, and if they are doing so at approximately the same rate and merging to the same fronted place of articulation as the Non-Mennonites.

I use data from the word list as well as the reading passage to analyze low back vowels /ɑ/ and /ɔ/. Using PRAAT, I took measurements of the first and second formants at the center of the vowel in question, and plotted them on a vowel chart.
Chapter 6. Results

The Mennonites exhibit devoicing at a greater rate than the Non-Mennonites. However, there is also significant individual variation, as shown in Table (1). Only one Mennonite participant does not devoice any final obstruents during the reading passage, the 19 year-old male who is currently attending a nearby community college. The young female who recently spent time in Florida teaching children devoiced over 20% of the possible final obstruents, along with the oldest male. There are no clear patterns related to gender, age, or degree of daily interaction with Non-Mennonites. However, they belong to the same family, and are in fact father and daughter, while the young male who does not devoice is part of the other family. This does not mean that such trends do not exist, but given the relatively small token number in this sample, we must leave speculation about social meaning to future studies. All but one of the Mennonite participants demonstrated that they sometimes devoiced obstruents word finally and sometimes produced those same obstruents fully voiced. However, it must also be stated that the reading passage from which the devoicing data was collected is not able to offer comparisons for all possible prosodic environments.

Table (2) shows that while there is overall less devoicing displayed by the Non-Mennonites, three of the women are attested to devoice one token each. They do not devoice the same word in the passage, nor are any of the tokens fully devoiced, just as the Mennonite devoicing. These results leave open the possibility that devoicing of final
obstruents is a feature in both the Mennonite and Non-Mennonite linguistic repertoire. Whether this is a borrowed feature from Dutchified English or the result of separate sound change is unclear at this point.

Table 1. Final Obstruent Devoicing among Mennonites in reading passage

Table 2. Final Obstruent Devoicing among Non-Mennonites in reading passage
All but two of the Mennonite participants produced the initial /ð/ as a /d/. Of those two, one is the same young male who did not devoice any final obstruents. One of the older men stopped 33% of the initial /ð/ phonemes. Again, we have no participants who use the feature categorically, as shown in Table (3). We again have a token of the Dutchified feature in the Non-Mennonites. The male Non-Mennonite participant produced one token of ð-stopping in the reading passage. However, ð-stopping is shown to be significantly more frequent in Mennonite speakers than Non-Mennonites.

And in fact, any attestation of ð-stopping is particularly interesting given that all participants, either individually or as a group, reported the use of “dis” and “dat” by speakers other than themselves, be they more conservative, Holmes County Amish, or sloppier speakers. It seems that the use of this feature is produced below the level of consciousness.

Table 3. Initial ð-stopping among Mennonites in reading passage
Table 4. Percentage of initial ð-stopping among Non-Mennonites

Perhaps the most surprising results are in the stark contrast between Mennonites’ and Non-Mennonites’ low back merger. Table (5) shows the results of all tokens of /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ from the reading passage and the word lists produced by Mennonites. The young female is the only Mennonite to have merged low back vowels. Table (6) shows the collective Mennonite data with her vowels taken out. As you can see, the Mennonites maintain a clear distinction between the two vowels. Table 8 shows the young female’s vowels on their own, which appear fully merged. Although I did not collect perceptual data of the merger, production data strongly suggests that the Mennonites, with the one exception, have not begun merging *caught* and *cot* vowels.
Table 5. Mennonite low back merger

Table 6. Mennonite low back merger without Female, 24
The Non-Mennonite vowels, however, all appear fully merged, shown in Table 7. This is somewhat surprising on its own given that recent descriptions of the low back merger in central Ohio have found mostly partial mergers, such as perceptual but not produced full merger (Labov, Ash, and Boberg, 2008). Both the 30 year old woman and the 57 year-old male show no distinction in their vowel productions, as shown in tables (10) and (12). Additionally, the 19 year-old male who used no ð-stopping or final devoicing has completely distinct vowels, as shown in Table (11).

Table 7. Non-Mennonite low back merger
Table 10. Non-Mennonite Male, 57

Table 11. Mennonite Male, 19
Table 12. Non-Mennonite Female, 30

6.2 Perceptions

The perceptual interview portion of my meetings with Mennonite participants reveals a concern, not toward differentiating themselves from the Non-Mennonites living around them, but rather positioning themselves in relation to those “up in Holmes County”. As one Mennonite man said, “One reason we like being down here is that we’re a little more laid back than in the main Amish communities, not quite as much emphasis on having the latest”. This is in line with Huffine’s ethnic boundary framework; because the Coshocton County Mennonites benefit from hard non-linguistic boundaries with the local Non-Mennonite by their plain dress and practices, as well as hard linguistic boundaries in their use of Pennsylvania German. Additionally, none of the Mennonites...
grew up Non-Mennonite. On the other hand, some of the Mennonites were born to Amish families and grew up in Holmes County. While their style of dress and practices such as driving cars differentiates them from some Amish and Mennonite Communities in Holmes County, it still marks them as Pennsylvania German Anabaptists, and they lack the hard linguistic boundaries because they all speak PG. These factors make the boundary between their communities relatively open, compared with the hard and closed boundary between the Mennonites and the Coshocton Non-Mennonites.

There is also an anxiety concerned more with transfer from English to PG, more so than PG to English. When asked how they have noticed their language changing, or how young people speak differently than older people, they either did not notice a clear difference, or they claim that even those who are fluent in PG use more English loan words than in previous generations. This may be a further indication that the Coshocton County community is in the beginning stages of language shift, in addition to the loss of English and PG domains and the influx of families into the church who do not speak PG.
Chapter 7. Discussion

Each of the three variables reported here is unique in its implications for PG interference. Devoicing final obstruents is the most straightforward result of influence from PG, which maintains the well-known Standard German devoicing feature which is also present in PG (Kopp, 1999). It is the most highly predicted variable in the interference hierarchy, and in Pennsylvania Dutch communities, it is the most salient feature. Interestingly, Pennsylvania Dutchified English exhibits devoicing in a much broader set of phonetic environments than is found in German, which Anderson (2014) attributes to bidirectional transfer in composite language environments, resulting in features that are distinct from both contributing language varieties. Because the current study did not specifically incorporate data related to other possible devoicing environments, it remains to be seen if Ohio Dutchified English has developed similar devoicing patterns.

The participants’ variable use of devoicing lends weight to the ethnolinguistic repertoire framework, and suggests that its use is not merely L1 interference as a result of second language acquisition, in which case we would expect to see regular devoicing. The young male who did not exhibit this feature is currently attending college and stated that he is sometimes teased by classmates for having a “Dutch accent”. This may contribute to his non-production of either of the consonantal variables. While further investigation into each individual’s relationship to the church district, such as their
intentions toward baptism and joining the church, may also be highly relevant to their use of Dutchified English features, this line of questioning was deemed by me to be unethical, particularly in the family setting in which the interviews took place and given my position as a non-Mennonite outsider of the community. However, a deeper investigation into each individual’s construction of Mennonite identity would likely further inform their use of Dutch features. Effects of register, topic, and interlocutor are other likely factors influencing the use of Dutchified features across contexts.

D-stopping, while a common feature of the English of L1 German speakers, it is not discussed in previous research on Amish English or Dutchified English, except by Thomas (2006), who documents English of Swiss Amish in Adams County, Indiana. He suggests that, because he does not find any other evidence of German influenced English, “it is at least as likely that the change is the result of a commonly attested historical change toward more typologically common sounds” (287). He also finds no evidence of this feature in Amish communities in neighboring counties. Without older attestations of δ-stopping in Coshocton County or Holmes County, we cannot say if it is a result of PG interference or a dialectal development.

While previous research treats Dutchified English, or Amish English, as language varieties, and characterize variable use as code switching or code mixing, I have found that the inter- and intra-speaker variation is more easily wedded to the existence of ethnically marked features using Benor’s ethnolinguistic repertoire model. As with Benor’s Jewish English repertoire, Dutchified English consists of a set of features, most originating in language contact, that are employed variably to index an ethno-religious
identity. This set of features is fluid and their use varies across communities, individuals, and contexts. Describing Dutchified English as an ethnolect or religiolect belies the fact that speakers vary in which features they exhibit and when. Although previous research has shown us that there is a set of features exhibited across communities, as evidenced by the interference hierarchy --- attested in communities across time and in different states, as well as Pennsylvania Dutchified English --- there is variation in the use, frequency, and social meaning, and also in the individuals who use them.

However, this model, which denotes a degree of both agency and fluidity, does not apply to the third variable: the low back merger. This feature is the only one to exhibit no intra-speaker variation. While it may be an indication that the two dialects are further diverging from one another by not sharing the vowel change, it is more likely that the Mennonites will eventually participate in the merger for two reasons. First, the young woman already shows mostly merged low back vowels. She is the only one that shows any merger, and while this may be attributed to her time in Florida, it may equally indicate that some young people in the community are engaging in the shift. Secondly, what Labov (1994) refers to as Herzog’s principle states that “mergers tend to expand at the expense of distinctions”. This theory is supported by the expansion of the low back merger across most regions of the United States, and if we take it seriously, it is unlikely that the Beachy Amish-Mennonites will continue to hold against it, despite their relative separation. Because of this, and given that the low back merger appears to be below the level of agency or awareness by the speakers, this variable is not considered a feature of Dutchified English. Rather, it is more likely to be a conservative
form of the regional distinction. This can be further investigated by collecting data from older Non-Mennonites from the area, if any remain who do not exhibit the merger.
Chapter 8. Conclusion

The stated goals of this research were to answer the following questions:

1) Do Mennonites in this Coshocton County church district speak English differently than the Non-Mennonites that live in the same area?
2) If so, what features differentiate their English?
3) What perceptions and attitudes are associated with those differences?

I found that overall the Mennonites do exhibit higher rates of final obstruent devoicing, ð-stopping, and do not appear to be participating in the low back merger to as great a degree as the non-Mennonites. This is not an exhaustive list of the features differentiating these dialects, and future research can likely find many other avenues, such as syntactic, lexical, and additional phonetic distinctions, including their vowel systems. I found that ð-stopping is highly salient, both from a linguistic standpoint and at the level of social consciousness. People frequently cite “dis” and “dat” as lexical features of Amish and Mennonites, and Mennonites make the further observation that they are found most often in Amish and Mennonites speakers in Holmes County.

I also found that the Mennonites orient their identity in relation to Holmes County Pennsylvania Dutch communities more than to the Non-Mennonites in their own geographic community. This can be understood through a ethnolinguistic boundary
theory (Giles, 1987), because they maintain hard, closed linguistic and non-linguistic boundaries with the non-Mennonites, while their boundaries with the Holmes County Anabaptists is more open, changeable, and less tangible. Therefore that boundary requires more linguistic maintenance.

Although this study is preliminary, it opens the door to many further investigations, including intra-community variation, comparisons with Holmes County Mennonites or Amish, and additional linguistic variables. I offered support for the use of ethnolinguistic repertoire theories for analyzing Dutchified English rather than the use of ethnolect or religiolect to describe Dutchified English.

Finally, I believe that this research is the first to describe the repertoire of Ohio Dutchified English, and have found minor differences from what has been reported in Pennsylvania Dutchified English, such as the saliency of final obstruent devoicing. Such differences are to be expected, given relatively little interaction between Ohio and Pennsylvania settlements, and given descriptions of divergence in the PG spoken in Pennsylvania and Ohio (Keiser, 2012). The condition and vitality of Ohio Dutchified English are largely unknown by linguists, and whether it is diverging from the regional standard English or unraveling in the same manner as Pennsylvanian Dutchified English remains to be seen.

Weaknesses of the currently study, including small sample sizes of both participants and data tokens, make conclusion about the distribution and use of the specified features premature. However, this thesis provides a first look at the English spoken by Mennonites in Ohio, shedding light on many directions of further research
and demonstrating that there are is in fact a largely unrecognized source of linguistic diversity in rural Ohio.
References


Appendix A: Word List
1. Hide
2. Teenagers
3. Mud
4. Mouse
5. Bath
6. Odd
7. Fat
8. Path
9. Father
10. Floor
11. Dirt
12. Job
13. Roof
14. Brother
15. Other
16. Look
17. Awed
18. Farther
19. Message
20. Dog
21. Cousin
22. Bag
23. Hired
24. Who’d
25. Thing
26. Walk
27. Caught
28. Rib
29. Apple
30. This
31. Udder
32. Spouse
33. Pawned
34. How’d
35. Hawk
36. Collar
37. Moose
38. Butter
39. Hid
40. House
41. Bells
42. Either
43. Want
44. Ditch
45. Woods
46. Fanned
47. Bag
48. Had
49. Hoed
50. Older
51. Mine
52. Built
53. Pond
54. Pad
55. There
56. Bathe
57. Handed
58. Hide
59. Mule
60. Cool
61. After
62. Know
63. Heed
64. Milk
65. Juice
66. Caller
67. Butcher
68. Cot
69. Choose
70. Visit
71. Buck
72. The
73. Head
74. Leave
75. Herd
76. Jury
77. Hock
78. Take
79. Family
80. Book
Appendix B: Reading Passage
John and his father went fishing in the pond behind the old school the weekend before John went off to college. His Dad brought a book to read and neither of them spoke for four hours as they sat by the water. For the most part it was a comfortable silence, although occasionally John began to feel oddly awkward. He would look up at the sky to see a hawk fly overhead or at insects crawling on the rocks nearby and pretended he was alone. Who’d know how much time they had left together? One day he would look back on those times with regret, although he was never sure if it was because he’d enjoyed them more than he’d realized, or because as time passed it was easy to forget the long, hot walk from their house, the coldness of his father, or that he’d never once caught a fish. It was easier to remember the smell of dewy grass and algae coming off the water at dawn and the way his dog ran alongside them, the tags on his collar jingling as he pawed at their feet.
Appendix C: Sample Interview Questions
1. How many people live in your household?
2. Do you have any siblings? Older or younger? How many?
3. Do you speak any language other than English? What language(s)? How well?
4. Does anyone in your household speak a language other than English? Who? Did you grow up hearing it?
5. Where did you go to school? Is that a public or a private school?
6. Did non-Mennonites go there? What about Amish?
7. Where do you work?
8. Do you work with mostly other Mennonites?
9. Do you work with Non-Mennonites?
10. Is your boss Mennonite?
11. Do you work with customers or clients?
12. Are they mostly Mennonites?
13. On a daily basis, how much do you interact with Non-Mennonites? In what situations?
14. In what situations do Mennonites interact with non-Mennonites in your community?
15. Do Amish live around here? Do Mennonites and Amish interact often? In what situations?
16. How is your community of Mennonites different from the other Mennonite communities?
17. How is it different from Amish that live nearby?
18. How is it different from non-Mennonites?
19. Is the Mennonite community in which you live separated from the Non-Mennonites that live in your city/town, or do you consider both Mennonites and Non-Mennonites part of the same community?
20. In what ways are they separate and what ways are they a one community?
21. Do you wish they were more or less separate? Why or how so?
22. During your life, have you seen Mennonite practices in your community change? How so? Are these changes for the better or for the worse?
23. Do Mennonites in Holmes County (or Plain City) speak differently than Non-Mennonites (either Amish or English)? If so, how is it distinct? What characteristics does Mennonite English have that other varieties do not?
24. Do Mennonites in your community speak differently than Mennonites in other communities?
   If so, how? What characteristics does your English have that distinguishes it from others.
25. Do you think the English spoken by Mennonites in your community is changing?
   If so, how?
   If so, do you think it’s a good thing, bad thing, or neither?