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PLAUDIETSCH: A REMARKABLE STORY OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Like other diasporic languages, *Plautdietsch* (Mennonite Low German) has undergone changes as a result of many linguistic environments. It is documented as a spoken variety among Mennonites in Europe (Germany, Poland, Ukraine, Russia), South America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay, Belize), and North America (USA, Canada, Mexico). While the varieties differ in certain aspects, they have been and still are mutually intelligible despite the geographic distances. Today, Plautdietsch is spoken as a primary language as well as a heritage language. We will present data from two particular Mennonite groups, one in Oklahoma, the other in Kansas, who split their trajectories over 100 years ago; yet, their Plautdietsch varieties display a surprising resemblance. This, we argue, represents a typical feature of Plautdietsch.

Keywords: Plautdietsch, syntax, phonology, language change, language maintenance, language contact

1. INTRODUCTION

Plautdietsch is a language spoken by many Mennonites throughout the world. As is typical for languages of (formerly) religiously persecuted groups, it is

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geographically very dispersed, with some distant groups remaining in contact with others, and some not. *Ethnologue* estimates 447,360 speakers of Plautdietsch across Europe and the Americas (<https://www.ethnologue.com/language/pdt1>), with speakers ranging from monolingual to multilingual, dominant to heritage, and young to old. In this chapter, we present a history of Plautdietsch to the present that shows how this language and its speakers have changed and what has remained stable over time. We call it remarkable for many reasons: Plautdietsch exemplifies a historical (and in many parts of the world contemporary) case of the consequences of linguistic isolation, but it also shows that language change and contact are inevitable, despite the greatest efforts to prevent them. In more recent times, it exemplifies the consequences of social changes on language and its people; this we illustrate on the basis of two Mennonite groups who came to the US over 100 years apart, yet show remarkable parallels undergoing language shift.

In §2, we address the migrational background of the so-called Russian Mennonites, i.e. the ancestors of both US groups, from the 16th century until their settlement in the New World, and how living circumstances have changed. These changes had a direct impact on how Mennonites could execute their spiritual and social lives. For many Mennonites, these two aspects are intimately related where faith informs every part of daily living. Once certain domains are not tightly embedded in a spiritual order anymore (e.g. education, politics, work), horizontal (local) ties become looser and vertical (national) ties become stronger (Salmons 2005). This in turn opens the pathway to language shift towards the surrounding majority language.

The historical background of Mennonites from a social perspective is an important base for the historical background of the linguistic development of Plautdietsch (§3). Through a closer look at phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical features, we explain the inherently diverse character of Plautdietsch as a consequence of its non-standardization as an oral medium and the vast variety of source dialects. Together with ever-changing contact language environments, the developmental stages of Plautdietsch are characterized by mixing and borrowing. One example of this unique character is the definite article paradigm of Plautdietsch as documented by Quiring (1928) in comparison with the Middle Low German and Middle Dutch of the time.

Finally, in §4 we present a linguistic sketch of Plautdietsch as it is spoken in North America (Canada, USA, Mexico) today. In this section, we draw on previous studies, but also our own field data from two communities in the US, i.e. Kansas and Oklahoma. In a comparative study, we contrast similarities and differences to previously documented varieties in Europe (Siemens 2012) and Canada (Cox et al. 2013) with a particular focus on the sound systems. We also show that especially on the level of morphology and syntax, we see a great stability between the historic and the modern varieties of Plautdietsch, where the typical West Germanic

¹ Accessed January 8, 2019.

parameters are kept. However, we present some Plautdietsch-specific examples of periphrastic *do*, and discuss the role of English in examples of VP ellipsis and case syncretism. We conclude this section with two studies on syntactic variation and innovation, one on dependent clauses (Kaufmann 2015) and the other on *wh*-questions (Hopp et al. 2018).

While this chapter presents an overview of previous research on Plautdietsch from different perspectives, it also demonstrates the gaps in research on this widely spoken, divergent but similar West Germanic variety. We therefore hope to set the stage for further (comparative) research on Plautdietsch and its speech communities.

2. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MENNONITE MIGRATIONS AND CHANGES IN THEIR LANGUAGE USE

In order to understand the linguistic maintenance on the one hand and changes on the other that today set Plautdietsch apart from other West Germanic varieties, it is necessary to be familiar with the Mennonites' motives for several relocations and their history. We will explore these developments in more detail in §2.1, and provide an overview of the social changes that Mennonite communities underwent throughout the centuries in §2.2. These social changes had a direct effect on changes in language use.

2.1 Mennonite migrations

The many movements of the Mennonite people present a complexity of cultural, economic, political and religious forces that has often been the central focus of Mennonite historical literature (see e.g. Brandt 1992, Epp 1993, Moelleken 1987, Sawatzky 1971). As an initial overview, Table 1 summarizes the major historical events of both Mennonite communities under closer scrutiny in this chapter, i.e. the so-called Russian Mennonites who later settled in North America.

Table 1. Historical overview of Mennonite migrations

1st half of 16th C	Birth of Anabaptist movements; settlement of Mennonites in the Netherlands, Northern Germany and Belgium Religious persecution under Charles V.
2nd half of 16th C	Mennonite migration to Vistula Delta, Poland
1786	Recruitment efforts through Russian colonization agent Georg van Trappe
1789, 1804	Formation of Mennonite colonies Chortitza and Molotschna in Ukraine

	1870	Enforced russification movement under Alexander II.
	1874-1880	Mennonite migration to the New World; two locations: 1) Settlements in Eastern and Central Kansas 2) Settlements in Manitoba, Canada
1)	1892	Mennonites from Kansas participate in the second land run in north-central and southwest Oklahoma
2)	1890	Outgrowth of Manitoba settlements; formation of further settlements in Saskatchewan, CA
	1916	School Attendance Act in Canada
	1922	Canadian Mennonite migration to Mexico (mainly Chihuahua province)
	1970s-today	Mexican Mennonite migration to southwestern Kansas

2.1.1 Mennonite migrations in Europe and former Russia

The Mennonites are one of various Anabaptist groups that formed as a religious splinter group from the Protestant movement in Europe in the 16th century. Their belief system is strongly based on the word of the Bible. The main tenets include adult baptism and the re-baptism of baptized children (hence the terms Anabaptist and *Wiedertäufer*, literally ‘re-baptizers’). Additionally, they practice strict pacifism and do not engage in worldly activities. The Mennonites’ name originated from their leading preacher Menno Simons who led his believers to Friesland (Epp 1993). Once the religious persecution intensified its repressive measures, many Mennonites decided to migrate to the Vistula Delta in West Prussia (today Poland) in the second half of the 16th century (Epp 1993).

After over a century, farmland in the growing community of Mennonites was more difficult to purchase, and prices rose considerably. Many families decided on another migration further eastward to Russia (today Ukraine) with the promise from Catherine the Great to be excluded from any military service, and be granted autonomy in their settlements (Sawatzky 1971). In 1789, they founded Chortitza and in 1804 Molotschna as the two mother colonies in Russia. Subsequent settlements such as Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde were created in the following years.

When the Russian nationalist movement under Tsar Alexander II. endangered the autonomous lifestyle of the Mennonites, the next migration wave began between 1874 and 1880. This time, they departed from Molotschna to the United States, and from Chortitza and its neighboring colonies Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde to Canada (Penner 1976). It is here that the history of the Mennonites in Kansas and the Mennonites in Oklahoma splits, thus in what follows, we will provide a separate trajectory for each of the two communities.

2.1.2 Historical background of Mennonites in Kansas

Those Mennonites coming from Chortitza, Bergthal and Kleine Gemeinde followed recruitment efforts of the Canadian government to settle along the US-Canadian border in Manitoba. When the communities increased in size due to ongoing immigration, many Mennonites bought land in Saskatchewan beginning in 1890. The growing Canadian nationalist sentiment that arose before and during World War I endangered some of the Mennonites core beliefs, thus a new wave of migration, this time to Mexico, began in 1922.

Mexico, mainly Chihuahua province, provided a space for a new beginning, since its president Obregón granted the Mennonites the same freedoms as previously enjoyed in Canada. Additionally, they were able to purchase farmland at fair prices (Hedges 1996). Although Mennonites were able to live according to their own spiritual standards in Mexico, they faced economic hardship throughout the 20th century. In the late 1970s, the first migration began to the United States, mainly Texas and Kansas; it is still ongoing today.

For western Kansas, Keel (2006) estimates that around 5,000 Mennonites including family members lived in the area west of Dodge City in 2005, and these numbers can be expected to be higher today since migration is ongoing and most families are doing well.

2.1.3 Historical background of Mennonites in Oklahoma

As mentioned earlier, the great immigration wave to North America took place between 1874 and 1880. During this time 18,000 Mennonites left Russia for the New World, of which 5,300 Mennonites of different congregations settled in eastern Kansas by the end of 1874. Kansas was one major destination due to efforts of railroad companies to populate land along the tracks.

Once the Kansas communities had grown in size, land became scarce and too expensive. In 1892, north-central and southwest Oklahoma were opened for settlement, and 25,000 people took part in this second land run, during which some Mennonites obtained land as well. More migration followed in the next years, and new Mennonite settlements emerged (Penner 1976).

2.2 Social changes in Mennonite communities

The linguistic origins of today's Plautdietsch are found in varieties of Low German spoken in the geographic locations where the Mennonites resided (for more detail, see §3). From the very beginning of their existence, Mennonites have been religiously persecuted by other Christian denominations. When the repercussions grew more intense in the Netherlands, Mennonites moved away from urban centers and tended to live in more rural areas. Due to this environment, they engaged more

intensively in farming for self-sustenance (Sawatzky 1971), a practice that persists in Mennonite communities around the world until today. This can be considered the first step towards the social and linguistic isolation of Mennonites, which later included having their own autonomous education and political organization, and practicing endogamy.

During the time in the Vistula Delta, a triglossic pattern developed among Mennonites. While Dutch continued to be used in church and education as the high variety (H-variety), Plautdietsch emerged as their in-group low variety (L-variety), and Polish and German were used as external varieties (E-varieties). Cox (2015) describes this development as a result of growing religious persecution that contributed to the formation of a group identity. According to Siemens (2012), this era can be considered the womb of Plautdietsch as a Dutch/Low German-based language with influences from Low Prussian (for more detail, see §3).

While triglossia persisted in Russia, the H and E varieties changed in that now the Luther translation of the Bible was used for church and education, thus a shift from Dutch to German occurred.² The E variety changed as a natural consequence of the change in linguistic environment from Prussian to Russian and Ukrainian (Cox 2015). Although Russian and Ukrainian played subordinate roles among the Mennonites (Moelleken 1987), both varieties left lexical traces in Plautdietsch mainly in the areas of food and farming (Siemens 2012).

Not only the language situation but also their community organization changed. The first two settlements of Chortitza and Molotschna in Russia had a so-called colony organization that was maintained across subsequent settlements, i.e. one main road along which stretches of farm land were distributed to the communities' families. The houses were built directly adjacent to the farm land, and each family had a small garden for growing vegetables and fruits and keeping small animals. Each colony had a one-room school and a church at its center (Sawatzky 1971). This colony organization enforced the social isolation of Mennonites and contributed to strengthening the self-perception of themselves as a people instead of a religious group.

For those Mennonites who migrated to North America, the newly formed settlements followed the same organization as the Russian model colonies, and the Mennonites were granted the same privileges as originally in Russia (Moelleken 1987). Former settlements were in essence transferred from Russia to Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan) and the United States (Kansas) which enabled an unchanged situation of social compartmentalization (Fishman 1980) and the maintenance of triglossia between the H, L and E varieties (Cox 2015).

² While Epp (1993) dates this shift in the beginning of the 19th century, i.e. after the Mennonites had left the Vistula Delta, an anonymous reviewer remarked that it took place around the end of the 18th century during their stay in Poland when the Mennonites lost contact with The Netherlands, replaced the Dutch Bible in church by the German Bible and started using German in their schools.

In Kansas and later in Oklahoma, however, the colony organization did not last long and families moved further apart to own their own larger farms. One informant reports that already by the turn of the century, Mennonites lived interspersed with non-Mennonites in Oklahoma as a consequence of the land runs. Additionally, the new distribution of land encouraged the owning of larger properties than in Russia, and thus did not provide a base for the traditional colony organization. Nevertheless, the language situation as well as the concept of community self-sufficiency remained essentially unaffected (Penner 1976). Penner (1976) reports a switch from German to English in education and church between the years 1930 and 1946, depending on the congregation (while the Herold Mennonite Church began their Sunday school in English in the 1930s, the first entry of English in the church chronicle (*Gemeindebuch*) is found in 1945). As is often the case, Plautdietsch remained the language in the home even after the switch in the local school and church, but once Mennonites started to go to public schools, English usually became the dominant language (p. c. with Howard Foote).

Another important change towards the surrounding majority culture happened when Oklahoma Mennonite men were drafted during World War I. Instead of moving once again, many Mennonites accepted the terms of service, while others accepted them conditionally, insisting on not fighting. A smaller percentage refused any engagement which could lead to suffering abuse at the hands of military officials (Penner 1976).

In contrast, the Mennonite settlements in Canada continued with the close-knit organization and opposition to any concessions on their beliefs much longer than their fellow Mennonites in Kansas. When they faced the equal threat of the introduction of English into their educational system with the legislation of the School Attendance Act in 1916, a shift to English was to be avoided under all circumstances. As a consequence, the most conservative Mennonites moved to Mexico and essentially rebuilt their colonies in this new environment. Spanish as the new E variety had no significant effect on the new immigrants. Mainly the men learned language skills for work and trade purposes, whereas women learned little to no Spanish at all (Hedges 1996, Moelleken 1987).

Today, we see important differences between the communities in western Kansas and Oklahoma that can be attributed to their separate timelines of immigration to the US and subsequent changes in their social structures. For Oklahoma, Penner (1976) reports that Mennonites largely adapted to the US culture by practicing industrial farming beyond the traditional Mennonite one-family farm. Industrialization in turn has made farming with fewer laborers possible and attracted many Mennonites to work in urban areas. Many Mennonite congregations have disappeared due to sinking member numbers,³ and the abandonment of

³ Nevertheless, there are exceptions. One informant reported a stable membership in his church, the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman). Penner's (1976) report is based on a variety of churches that all expose the same tendencies.

German as well as Plautdietsch by the younger generations, with some maintenance remaining only in older generations, is a consequence of these developments.

In western Kansas, however, language shift is in its initial stages. The community is prospering and memberships in different churches grow through the ongoing immigration from Mexico and Canada. Many Mennonites from Mexico have undergone significant lifestyle changes with settlement in Kansas. Instead of the colony settlements, they have opened the closed infrastructure and live interspersed with US-Americans. Although many Mennonites continue as members of Old Colony churches, there are numerous young modern Mennonite churches, most of them founded in the US. The majority of Mennonites have abandoned the strict traditional clothing and are not identifiable as being Mennonite purely by looks. Their children go to public schools and have adapted English as their primary language for the most part. Most spouses in their thirties and forties use English along with Plautdietsch as their language of communication (Vosburg 2019).

This new linguistic and social situation that diverges sharply from their former life in Mexico is reflected in the modern Mennonite churches: German is no longer used, and even Plautdietsch plays a peripheral role, limited to certain special occasions, such as the visit of a guest pastor or certain events. Since the social compartmentalization of language has collapsed, the triglossic situation between German (H-variety), Plautdietsch (L-variety) and English (E-variety) does not continue. However, the traditional churches maintain Plautdietsch and German in their service. This is a remarkable effort, considering the fact that their members are also fluent in English.

2.3 Summary and conclusion

In this section, we have explored the linguistic consequences of the social changes in two Mennonite communities. While Mennonites have for centuries lived isolated, set themselves apart from the rest of the world, and followed their community-internal rules and organization, these structures are now mainly dissolved in the United States. Thus, in Kansas and since 1892 in Oklahoma, Mennonites from different Russian communities or congregations often had contact with or even transferred to a different congregation, if their life situation demanded this. In Oklahoma this kind of mixing was frequently necessary because of the manner in which land was dispersed through the land runs and lotteries, starting in 1889. Most Mennonites did not venture south into Oklahoma until after the second land run in 1892 – and they did not actively participate in the 1892 Land Run because of the violence often resulting from this manner of land settlement. Even though they were not directly involved in this land run, they often were not able to remain in the same group that they or their ancestors had associated with.

Along with this development, we see the breakup of previous social compartmentalization (Fishman 1980) that supported triglossia between

Dutch/German, Plautdietsch and varying external varieties. With the loss of the division of social realms, the foundation for linguistic separation crumbled. This happened much earlier for the Oklahoma group, and we see it now happening in the southwestern Kansas group.

Processes that have influenced this development cannot be purely defined by community-internal changes, but can be placed within larger changes of regional structures shifting to state or national structures. One example is the change from private to public education in both Mennonite communities, as shown in Figure 1.

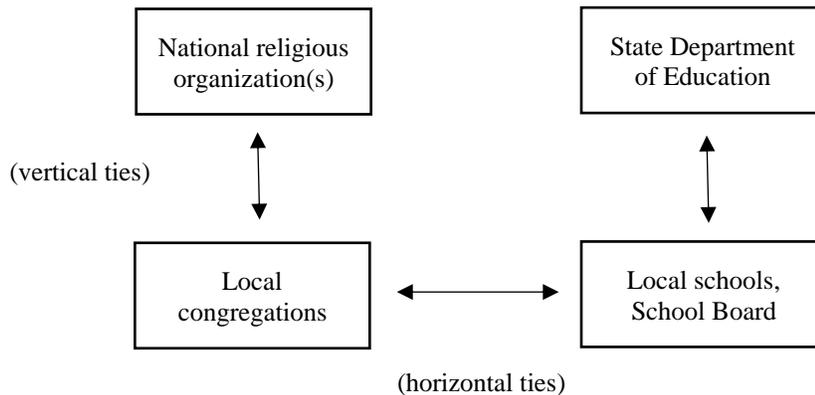


Figure 1. Examples for vertical and horizontal ties in a community (Salmons 2005:135).

Salmons (2005) defines this shift from local to national structures as verticalization, and provides evidence for parallel developments among Germanic varieties spoken in communities throughout the United States, independent of religious affiliation. In conclusion, whereas Hedges (1996) describes the maintenance of the triglossia in Mexico as “the result of specific processes of maintenance efforts situated in a specific social, economic, and political context” (p. 335), in the US these contexts have largely changed with regard to lifestyle, schooling, work, and church, both for the Oklahoma and the Kansas group. However, these changes happened on two different timelines.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF PLAUTDIETSCH

In this section we trace the linguistic development of Plautdietsch as it evolved out of several varieties of Dutch and Low German, as spoken in the 16th century. We show that a considerable diversity prevailed in northwestern Europe at the level

of spoken usage, with Dutch and the Low German of the Hanseatic League offering closely related yet distinct written forms used in formal settings. They played little role, however, in the lives of most Mennonites, for as noted in the previous section, many were illiterate or otherwise had little need in their daily lives for written language. Thus, Plautdietsch was born out of a spoken usage which in the first two centuries of its evolution at least was little influenced by a written language, either Dutch or Hanseatic Low German or Standard German. This situation began to change slightly in the mid-nineteenth century. The changes and developments that the varieties of Dutch and Low German spoken by the Mennonites underwent when the Mennonites left their original homelands and settled in a new linguistic setting will be the focus in this section.

3.1 The linguistic situation in 16th century northern Europe

The initial followers of Menno Simons lived primarily in two areas of the German Empire⁴: Flanders and Friesland. The dialects or varieties of Low German (in the broad sense) spoken in these areas were all descendants of West Germanic and classified as “Low” and thus had not been affected by the High German Consonant Shift (see §4). It is useful for understanding the development of Plautdietsch to know some general similarities and differences between these varieties.

Quiring (1928:42) makes the following statement about the origins of the language spoken by the Mennonites in Russia:

Die Mundart von Chortitza ist, wie auch die anderen Mundarten der Mennoniten in Rußland, eine Mischmundart. Sie wird also so, wie sie gegenwärtig in Rußland lebt, im Ausgangsgebiet der Kolonisten heute nirgends gesprochen. Die ersten Ansiedler kamen aus verschiedenen Dialektgebieten Westpreußens und es wird sich in der neuen Heimat, im Großen und Ganzen wenigstens, die Mundart der Mehrheit durchgesetzt haben. Für die Entwicklung unserer Mundarten ist die noch in Holland im 16. Jahrhundert erfolgte und äußerlich zum Teil auch heute noch bestehende Spaltung der Mennoniten in Alt Vlamen, Vlamen und Friesen von Bedeutung gewesen.

[The dialect of Chortitza is, like the other dialects of Mennonites in Russia, a mixed one. That means that it is not spoken in its current form anywhere else outside of the region occupied by the original colony in Russia. The first settlers came from different dialectal regions in West Prussia, and we can roughly assume that the dialect of the majority became dominant in the new home. Important for the development of our dialects was the split of Mennonites into Old Flemish*, Flemish and Frisians, as it occurred in the Netherlands in the 16th century and partially continues to exist today.]

⁴ The official name of the empire was the “Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.”

(*those who left Flanders and settled in Friesland)

Some additional background information is useful for understanding what Quiring points out about this linguistic diversity that was maintained to some degree well into the 19th century, in some areas even later. In the 16th century the original homelands of the Mennonites in northern Europe were populated by descendants of several Germanic groups; the largest of these were the Franks (which had several sub-groups), the Saxons and the Frisians. All three of these groups spoke distinct dialects; Frisian was arguably distinct enough at one time to have had the status of a separate language. Only the Frisians were able to resist the advance of the Franks in the 8th and 9th centuries and maintain their independence, both politically and linguistically. By the time of the Reformation, however, the Frisians and their language had lost some of this status with Dutch becoming the administrative language and Frisian being maintained in oral usage (though in the 19th century it regained administrative status).⁵ Of significance for the understanding of the development of Plautdietsch (PD) are primarily two facts:

- i) Certain phonological and lexical features can be identified in PD as either Frisian, Saxon or Franconian in origin. The language of Menno Simons was fundamentally Frisian, though in his writings he intentionally used almost as much Low German as his local variety, Frisian-Dutch, to make his writing more widely accessible (Niebaum 2006).
- ii) The closer contact of these dialects with each other after migration to West Prussia required some leveling and accommodation - the differences between Middle Saxon on the one hand, and Middle Low Franconian on the other from the centuries prior to the founding of the Anabaptist movement had remained well enough intact to require this linguistic adaptation. Nevertheless, some colonies developed a blended variety with features from the original language that can be identified in the speech of their descendants yet today.

All of the varieties spoken by the early Anabaptists could be considered “Low German” in the broadest sense of the word; they thus had many fundamental features in common. Yet, the Mennonite settlers in the Vistula River Delta in the late 16th century were a linguistically diverse people, particularly at the outset of their movement. It is therefore not surprising that once they began to interact with each other in their new-found closer proximity, it was necessary to come to terms on what variety of Low German should be used, and for what purpose. The solution for their formal usage in worship, formal documents, schooling, etc. was Dutch, which all of the educated amongst them had learned in their former homeland. Many Mennonites – the exact or even a rough percentage is unknown – were illiterate and thus had a command of only the spoken language in their community. Dutch remained the formal language of the literate for the duration of their stay in West Prussia and for several decades after migration to Russia began (but see fn 2).

⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this information on Frisian.

The language of everyday interaction for all Mennonites remained some spoken variety of Dutch, which at the time was closely related to the Low German varieties throughout the North German Plain, including West and East Prussian.⁶

Once settled in the Vistula Delta, the Mennonites began to adapt their speech to the local varieties of Low German (West and East Prussian); however, for some groups and in particular the older generation, this adaptation was limited. Quiring (1928:46) asserts, based on his sources, that the Mennonites who spoke a Frisian variety maintained their language to a recognizable extent for over two hundred years; it played a significant role in the formation of the eventual Chortitza variety in Russia. For this maintenance to have been possible, a critical mass of the youngest generation did not sufficiently adopt the speech of the surrounding Prussians in some colonies.

Eventually, enough phonological shifts occurred in the PD of the majority so that a type of koine was formed out of which came the distinctiveness of today's PD. This somewhat unique variety was different enough from all the source dialects and varieties that it had a status of its own, to the extent that a direct connection to its sources was often lost. This is not the case, interestingly, in the word *Plautdietsch*, which can be directly traced to *platt* 'low' that underwent only a very characteristic shift, diphthongization, becoming [aʊ] in most varieties (alongside [ɑ] and [ɔ], see Burns 2015). Much the same can be said about *Dietsch*: it stands apart from *Deutsch* (German) and *Duits* (Dutch), possibly from the unrounding of [œy] to [i:], to produce *Dietsch*.⁷ Despite these changes, the word is transparently related to German, Low German and Dutch, but with enough differences to stand on its own as a unique name for the Mennonite variety.

These are just two examples of vowel shifts that occurred during the time the Mennonites lived in the Vistula Delta. Along with these was a general lowering of vowels before /r/ and (other) velars. Among the consonants, a very characteristic shift occurred in the environment of a front vowel or [j] or [ɹ], namely palatalization. These shifts and many more will be explored in more detail below.

These changes in the sound system of the evolving Mennonite dialect were not always uniform or all-pervasive, but it is clear that contact with West Prussian (WP), a very eastern variety of LG spoken in this area by the non-Mennonites, played a significant role. West and East Prussian speakers also did not live in linguistic isolation; they themselves had regular contact with speakers of Slavic varieties, of Yiddish and of Baltic-Finnic varieties. Whether the evolving PD ever

⁶ Both West and East Prussian were varieties of Low German and thus the term *Niederpreußisch* 'Low Prussian' applies to both varieties. The term *Hochpreußisch* 'High Prussian' derived from the *Mittelhochdeutsch* 'Middle High German' spoken by the Teutonic Knights who were called into this area during the Crusades to defend it against the non-Christians to the east – some of whom were Prussian!

⁷ An alternate source is Middle Dutch *Diets*, which already had the unrounded vowel; both Dutch sources would have required [s > ʃ]. In Old English the word was *theodisc*, and *theodiscus* was used to refer to Germanic languages.

influenced the local, dominant WP is a question that has been neglected in the research. What has been determined and agreed upon is that two fundamental differences between PD and Low German/Dutch, and between PD and WP came out of this contact situation: i) PD never gained the status of a regional dialect of Low German which was used in a specific geographic location, and ii) speakers of PD, in contrast to speakers of Low German, developed their own unique ethnic identity – called a ‘cult language’ by Siemens (2012: 31) – whereas speakers of Low German have an identity based primarily on their citizenship (see §2 for more detail on the formation of Mennonite group identity).

These differences can be seen on the phonological level; as Nieuweboer states it (1998: 130), present-day PD, which had its beginnings in the Vistula Delta, is not a descendant of one specific “proto-PD” dialect but of a number of dialects with different phoneme systems. The Mennonites did not settle in this area as a single group but came in waves from different countries or parts of countries. The same migration pattern held true in the settlement of the two colonies in Russia, out of which smaller colonies or communities were established. Linguistic diversity was inherent in this development. As we will see below in §4, linguistic diversity is still apparent in the PD spoken in North America today.

3.2 Phonetic and phonological changes in the formation of PD

3.2.1 The vowel system

In order to accurately capture the changes in the PD sound system, it would be necessary to have a record of the varieties of Dutch spoken by the Mennonites when they began their migration to the Vistula Delta. Such a record does not exist for the obvious reason that these were spoken varieties not used for writing; the Mennonites who were literate used the local written Dutch of the time for this purpose. According to most experts on the language spoken by the Mennonites while living in the Low Countries, their spoken usage probably resembled Middle Low German (MLG) – as documented, for instance, in Schiller & Lübben’s (1875) *Mittelniederdeutsches Wörterbuch* – as much or more than it did the Dutch used in formal documents at this time. Schiller & Lübben compiled their dictionary on the basis of documents from the period 1350-1600, which thus includes the period of the Mennonite migration to West Prussia. Although the texts they used do not necessarily reflect the spoken language of this period, they give us one close approximation of the Low German varieties spoken by the Mennonites before they began their migration eastward. Another is, of course, the written Dutch of the day. The following list provides some examples from the Schiller & Lübben dictionary in comparison with Dutch of the time (Middle Dutch, MD, examples from the *Historische woordenboeken* of the *Instituut voor de Nederlandse Taal* available at <http://gtb.inl.nl>) and with PD, Dutch and Standard German of today:

Table 2. Examples from Schiller & Lübben dictionary of Middle Low German (MLG) in comparison with Middle Dutch (MD), Plautdietsch (PD), Dutch (D) and Standard German (SG)

MLG	MD	PD	D	SG	
acht	achte	acht	acht	acht	‘eight’
alleen/allein	allene	auleen	alleen	allein	‘alone’
bedde	bedde	Bad	bed	Bett	‘bed’
drinken	drinken	drintj	drinken	trinken	‘to drink’
geven	geven	jäwe	geven	geben	‘to give’
helpen	helpen	halpe	helpen	helfen	‘to help’
melk	melc/melke	Maltj	melk	Milch	‘milk’
rennen	rennen	rane	rennen	rennen	‘to run’
suster	suster	Sesta	zuster	Schwester	‘sister’
twelf/twalf/twölf	twalaf/twalef/twalof	twalw	twaaif	zwölf	‘twelve’

The most striking feature of this list is the similarity between MLG and MD. Schiller & Lübben (1875) state that all varieties of MLG, which for them included MD, were mutually intelligible.

The same was likely to have been true though to a lesser degree when the Mennonites spoke with their new neighbors in West Prussia, who were speakers of Low Prussian (of both the West and East varieties). Low Prussian had its own unique characteristics. A record of how it was spoken at the time of the Mennonites’ arrival is no longer readily available. However, there is a dictionary compiled in the mid-19th century by H. Frischbier (1882) from other dictionaries of Low Prussian that gives us some idea. In the preface to this dictionary (p. iv), the author comments on the methodology and objectives of his work:

Wohl keine Provinz unseres großen Vaterlandes besitzt auch nur annähernd einen ähnlichen Reichtum an Idiotismen wie gerade Ost- und West-Preußen. Infolge der zahlreichen Einwanderungen deutscher Kolonisten fast aller Stämme während der Ordenszeit und später, begegnen wir hier den verschiedenartigsten Wortbildungen, den mannigfachsten dialektischen Formen. Die Berührung und Mischung der Ansiedler mit den slavischen und litauischen Nachbarn, wie sie seit Jahrhunderten bestanden, und der gleich alte Verkehr mit überseeischen Nationen hat ferner dazu beigetragen, der Mundart eine Färbung zu geben, die frappiert, aber auch interessiert; ja Funken jener längst erloschenen Sprache der heidnischen Ureinwohner des Landes blitzen hin und wieder in einzelnen Wörtern auf, und diese bilden eine weitere Eigentümlichkeit preußischer Mundart. Diese Wortformen zurückzuführen auf ihre Anfänge, erschien mir als ein notwendiges Erfordernis für ein Preußisches Wörterbuch; es sind daher in dem vorliegenden Werke für die etymologische Klarstellung der betreffenden Wörter die in Betracht kommenden fremden Sprachen und die deutschen Mundarten nach Bedürfnis herangezogen und nach bestem Wissen und Können verwertet worden.

[Probably no other province of our great fatherland possesses a similar wealth of idioms that even comes close to that of East and West Prussia. In the process of numerous migrations of German colonists from nearly all regions during the time of the Order [of Teutonic Knights] and later, we encounter here the most diverse word constructions and the most numerous dialectal forms. The contact and mixing of the settlers with the Slavic and Lithuanian neighbors, as they existed for centuries, and the equally old association with oversea nations contributed further to giving the dialect a coloring that amazes but also stirs interest; indeed, sparks of a long extinguished language of the heathen original inhabitants of the land shimmer now and then in individual words, and these form a further peculiarity of the Prussian dialect. Taking these word forms back to their beginnings seemed to me to be a necessary challenge posed by a Prussian dictionary. The foreign languages and German dialects have therefore in the present work been drawn upon according to need for the etymological clarity of the relevant words and have been utilized with the utmost knowledge and ability.]

The complex origins of Low Prussian, especially the influence of the contact languages mentioned and the somewhat mysterious, or in any case, unresearched or undocumented Old Prussians – made even more mysterious with the word *heidnisch* ‘heathen’ – led to the indisputable conclusion that Low Prussian differed quite significantly from the other MLG varieties spoken in northwestern Europe. We can safely conclude that a major source of the changes that occurred in the MLG varieties spoken by the Mennonites can be found in Low Prussian itself, apart from the other languages that the Mennonites had contact with that had previously altered Low Prussian: Lithuanian and the Slavic varieties. All of these languages and varieties, but primarily Low Prussian – assuming the Mennonites associated in daily life more with people of Germanic than of other origins – forged the PD that was brought to North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

3.3 Specifics of language shift in the Mennonite Low German varieties

3.3.1 Vowel shifts

Though some linguists argue that it is not possible to directly trace the development of the PD vowel system from Dutch or MLG, Siemens (2012) makes a concerted effort to do just that. He begins with the following types of vowel shifts:

- (1) The distributionally conditioned vowel shifts forming PD, according to Siemens (2012:79)

⁸ An anonymous reviewer commented that “there is confusion with term *Old Prussian*, which also was a Baltic language related to Lithuanian, for which still historical texts and a dictionary exist.”

1. Lengthening in open syllables
2. /i/-umlaut, as in Middle High German, causing the shift /a/ > /e/
3. Lowering when a non-nasal or a velar consonant follows
4. Velarization of vowels before /l/
5. Diphthongization of /o/ to /oa/, and /e/ to /ea/ before vocalized /r/
6. Diphthongization of /o/, /ø/ to /oø/, /øø/, and /e/ to /ea/ before /g, k/

He continues with the explication of the following shifts which are not distributionally conditioned unless so indicated (for some phonemes the IPA symbol is indicated in parentheses for clarity):

- (2) Other major vowel shifts outlined by Siemens (2012: 82-88)
 1. MLG /a/ > PD /au/: *plaut, daut, Kaut* (SG *platt, das(s), Katze* ‘flat’, ‘that’, ‘cat’)
 2. MLG /ë/ (ɛ) > PD /ā/: *wajch, sass, Brat* (SG *weg, sechs, Brett* ‘way’, ‘six’, ‘board’)
 3. MLG /i/ > PD /e/: *enn, Medd, hette* (SG *in, Mitte, Hitze* ‘in’, ‘mid(dle)’, ‘heat’)
 4. MLG /u/ > PD /o/ except before /nd, nt, ng, gg, kk/: *stomm, kromm, Storm* (SG *stumm, krumm, Sturm* ‘mute’, ‘crooked’, ‘storm’)
 5. MLG /o, u/ before /g, k/ > PD /oa/: *koake, jebroake, jeloage* (SG *kochen, gebrochen, gelogen* ‘cook’, ‘broken’, ‘lied’)
 6. MLG /ö/ (œ) < /o/ undergoes unrounding and shifts to PD /ā/: *Statja, Ratja, Tjap* (SG *Stöcke, Röcke, Köpfe* ‘sticks’, ‘skirts’, ‘heads’); there are notable exceptions such as: *derch, tjemm(s)t* (SG *durch, komm(s)t* ‘through’, ‘come’ [2/3SG])
 7. MLG /ü/ (y) < /u/ collapses with a lowered /i/ to PD /e/: *denn, derch, mell* (SG *dünn, durch, Mull* ‘thin’, ‘through’, ‘mill’); some exceptions are: *Barscht, Darscht, Wartel* (SG *Bürste, Durst, Wurzel*, ‘brush’, ‘thirst’, ‘root’)
 8. The umlaut /ü/ (y) > PD /i/, but not before nasals followed by a dental or velar, but as is evident in the examples, PD, like other WGmc dialects, in contrast to SG, has never had many front rounded vowels: *Bridgj, Midj, tridj* (SG *Brücke, Mücke, zurück*, ‘bridge’, ‘mosquito’, ‘back’)
 9. MLG /â/ (a:) > PD /ō/ (o:) as in *Schop, Mot, Grot, gohne* (SG *Schaf, Maß, Gräte, gehen*, ‘sleep’, ‘measure’, ‘bones’, ‘go’)
 10. The various varieties of /ê/ (e:) (there are four in MLG) collapsed into PD /ee/ as in *Breef, leef, Tjleet* (SG *Brief, lieb, Kleid*, ‘letter’, ‘dear’, ‘dress’)
 11. The old, long MLG /ô/ (o:) > PD /oo/ [oʊ]: *doone, goot, Hoot* (SG *tun, gut, Hut*, ‘do’, ‘good’, ‘hat’)
 12. Parallel to the shift in 11 is the unrounding of MLG /ö/ (ø) to PD /ee/: *heede, bleede, meed* (SG *hüten, bluten, müde*, ‘heed’, ‘bleed’, ‘tired’)

The examples above clearly illustrate that through these changes in the vowel system, PD took on a distinct sound, one that could not be confused with either Dutch, MLG or the German of the time. A useful generalization is that front rounded vowels disappeared – though [y] reappeared to some extent in the Chortiza variety – and more diphthongs were created. Thus, through their vowel system alone the speakers of PD had a unique identity, one that cannot be traced back directly to the MLG vowel system. For this reason some linguists argue that it is misguided to establish the inventory of vowel phonemes on the assumption that they came about through the same set of shifts or alterations that occurred in the evolution of today's Low German (to various degrees in the different varieties of Low German). More will be stated in §4 about the vowel system of PD today in its various varieties.

3.3.2 /r/-vocalization and its effects on PD vowels and consonants

Already in MLG times the lowering of /i/ and /u/ to /e/ and /o/ in combination with /r/ → [ɐ] occurred; in PD /r/-vocalization caused the disappearance of /r/ in final position, according to Siemens (2012:79). This lowering was not all-pervasive, and thus did not by itself bring about a change in PD phonology, since it occurred only in final position, in complementary distribution with /r/ followed by a vowel. Thus, we have *Dea* 'door' vs. *Deare* (SG *Türen*, 'doors'). The orthography simply does not capture this fact.⁹ Moreover, the manner in which vowel changes occurred in combination with /r/-vocalization is quite complex: lowering also usually did not occur if /r/ was preceded by a long vowel and followed by a nasal: PD *Stern*, *Twerm*, *Korn* (SG *Stern*, *Zwirn*, *Korn*, 'star', 'yarn', 'corn'). If followed by a dental, /r/ disappeared: PD *hed*, *Ped*, *Wot* (SG *hörte*, *Pferd*, *Wort*, 'heard', 'horse', 'word'). Siemens (2012:73-74) grants /ɐ/ and, for reasons of unification also /ə/, the status of a phoneme, citing the minimal pairs *verr+e* [fɛrə]: *fēr+e* [fɛrə] 'before the', 'for the'; with this assumption he breaks new theoretical ground. Further research is required to precisely determine the phoneme inventory of PD.

A far more pervasive change in the consonant system occurred with palatalization. The source of palatalization was quite undoubtedly the contact with Slavic varieties to the east, though Siemens points out (2012:94) that some of the resulting sounds did not exist in the Slavic languages in contact with the PD speakers. He proposes that the Baltic languages are responsible, but he points out that the Dutch varieties the Mennonites spoke upon arrival in the Vistula Delta also exhibited forms of palatalization. It is quite clear that the maintenance of the Dutch diminutive marker *-je* contributed to the spread of palatalization, which generalized quite widely to the environment (not necessarily just the post-position) of the palatal

⁹ Siemens (2012:79) states that there are more spelling systems for PD than there are writers of PD (!), but this particular phonological rule is consistently indicated in the transcriptions of PD. The fact that it has been does not, however, provide sufficient support for [ɐ], the phonetic realization through /r/-vocalization, being a phoneme. See further discussion below.

vowels /i, e, ea/ (whether long or short), and /l, n, r, w/. Thus we have the following examples of PD palatalization, contrasting with their Dutch and German cognates, where the spelling <tj> represents the palatalized form of /k/, as heard in those varieties of PD that, according to Siemens (2012), were most affected by contact with the surrounding Slavic languages. More on palatalization follows in §3.5 and §4; for simplicity's sake, we indicate just one type of palatalization here:

Table 3. Palatalization in Plautdietsch (PD)¹⁰ in comparison to Dutch (D) and Standard German (SG)

PD	D	SG	
Tjäatj	keuken	Küche	'kitchen'
Tjoatj	kerk	Kirche	'church'
tjanne	kennen	kennen	'to know'
tjljen	klein	klein	'small'
Voltj	volk	Volk	'folk/people'
lintje	link-	link-	'left'

Tjanne indicates that palatalization preceded the lowering of /e/ to /a/, since /a/ would not have induced palatalization. This suggests that palatalization was a very early sound change, since vowel lowering began already in the Vistula Delta. This one data point (presumably there are others like it) might provide evidence for the hypothesis that palatalization was a process that began already in the Dutch environment and was retained at least until the PD speakers had sufficient contact with speakers of Slavic languages. Some linguists, such as Lasch (1914) and Klein (1985) claim that Old Saxon had a strongly palatal pronunciation of /k/. Thus, the Mennonites who spoke the varieties of Dutch deriving from Old Saxon might well have had a tendency to palatalize from centuries earlier. Again we see how the earliest features of the Mennonites' language carried through to influence later developments. The details of how this carry-through occurred cannot unfortunately be laid out due to lack of a historical record.

We have relied here quite heavily on Siemens' (2012) documentation and analysis for two reasons: i) It is written in German and may therefore not be readily accessible to many linguists; ii) It is the most recent study, and Siemens takes prior sources into careful consideration. Nevertheless, Siemens probably does not have the final word on the PD sound system, which has always been problematic. Part of the problem is the diversity of the sources mentioned above. Although we may have good historical records of West Germanic varieties such as the various varieties of Franconian, Old Saxon and Frisian, as well as of the descendants of these up to the time of the Mennonite migration to the Vistula Delta, equally reliable sources for what shifts and variations occurred during the sojourn in the Vistula Delta and subsequently on the Russian steppe do not exist. Quiring (1928) provides

¹⁰ As noted by an anonymous reviewer, palatalization also occurs in Frisian: *tsjerke* [tʰɛrkə] 'church'.

one of the earliest records of PD, but focussing primarily on the Chortitza colony. Numerous other studies date from roughly this period and the later decades, but none from the period spent on the Russian steppe beginning in 1789 and the departure from the steppe beginning in 1874. It is possible that some forms of variation occurred during this time, whether it was the continued individual development of the two most commonly assumed varieties, Chortitza and Molotschna, or the inverse, a levelling of some features of these two varieties, a good possibility given their close proximity. Nieuweboer (1999:130) agrees, based on his study of recordings from 1928 to 1995, that the division of PD into these two varieties is largely correct. He also points out that the modern varieties of PD have a large number of allophones, indicating that their variability may date back to the original languages spoken by the first Mennonite settlers and need not be explained by the mixing of the first PD dialects in the daughter colonies.

What has transpired more recently, as will be confirmed by our own data in §4, can be characterized as a mixing and borrowing between the two, as well as new innovation in certain more isolated areas. Nieuweboer's (1999) presentation of the sound system used in the Altai dialect of PD, for instance, reveals some new developments since 1917. Sawatzky (1986) documents cases of lexical borrowing from the Molotschna variety by Chortitza speakers; unfortunately, a detailed discussion of how this affected the sound system of their speech is lacking.

3.4 Plautdietsch morphology in the developmental stage

When describing PD morphology, it is useful and consistent to compare it with Dutch and German morphology, since both of these languages, first Dutch then German, served as the "official" language for formal purposes (worship, education, business, etc.). It is general knowledge amongst scholars that Dutch was undergoing a shift from a morphologically based case and gender marking system to one that was more analytical (e.g. use of *van* 'from' in place of genitive morphology) or biological (e.g. using *de* for both masculine and feminine). With this shift comes deflection in case markers, much of which was present already in the 16th century when the Mennonites left their original homelands for the Vistula Delta. It is very difficult if not impossible to determine with certainty, however, how much Dutch of this time influenced the local varieties, or vice versa. There never was a Dutch equivalent of Martin Luther who consciously and systematically modeled written Dutch on Dutch of the street. Thus, we cannot determine whether the Dutch varieties spoken by the Mennonites before leaving for Prussia, which formed the basis of the PD that evolved there, had a morphology that resembled the written Dutch of the day. Undoubtedly, in its case system it was a morphologically "reduced" form of Dutch, just as spoken varieties of German of the time were – and are today. Even the written Dutch of the 17th century was already significantly

deflected when compared to its earliest form (which used Latin as a model), see de Korne & Rinkel (1987:31).

According to Epp (1993:86) a transition from Dutch to German occurred in the language of worship between 1820-1840¹¹. By this time a well-established standard written German existed (since mid-18th century). The adoption of this language in worship and other formal spheres of life undoubtedly meant that the Mennonites needed formal instruction, not just for learning German morphology. The historical record has documented the employment of teachers brought in from Germany for this purpose.¹² Undoubtedly there was considerable unevenness in the transition from Dutch to German. For some, German was adopted as a prestige language while others looked at this as smugness.

There is insufficient documentation of PD as it existed in the 19th century to draw solid conclusions about its morphology; the closest record was created by Quiring (1928), but almost exclusively of the Chortitza variety – which was the most conservative at that time. Given the growing influence of German on PD in the 19th century, German morphology undoubtedly contributed to changes in PD morphology. Quiring documents some case forms from German. We return to this point in the next section where we consider PD morphology as it exists today in the North American varieties.

To conclude our discussion of PD morphology in the developmental period, we compare Lasch's paradigm of definite (demonstrative) articles from Middle Low German (MLG, roughly 12th-17th centuries) with Quiring's (1928) paradigm for PD:

Table 4. Paradigm of definite articles in Middle Low German (MLG) and Plautdietsch (PD)

a. MLG definite articles (Lasch 1914:218)				
	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	dê, di(e)	dû, dê, di(e)	dat	dê, di(e)
Gen	des	der(e)	des	der
Dat	dem(e), den	der(e)	dem(e), den	den
Acc	den(e)	dû, dê, di(e)	dat	dê, di(e)
b. PD definite articles (Quiring 1928:92)				
	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	dê	dê	daut	dê
Dat	dēm	dê	daut	dê
Acc	dēn	dê	daut	dê

¹¹ An anonymous reviewer remarked that the change from Dutch to German occurred earlier, i.e. around the end of the 18th century, when the Mennonites lost contact with The Netherlands, replaced the Dutch bible in church by the German Bible and used German in their schools.

¹² Another reason was to thwart the influence of Russian.

The phonetic symbols are taken directly from the sources. Quiring (1928:50) explains what sounds they represent as follows; we assume the symbols are the same in both sources:

- The circumflex is used for the ‘closed articulation’ of the long vowels; [ê] thus approaches the sound of <e> in North German ‘See’ or ‘Tee’.
- [ē] was pronounced like North German *geben* ‘give’ and *Leben* ‘life’. Whether this pronunciation was any different from today’s SG *geben* and *Leben* is not clear; any difference is doubtful, as SG pronunciation of vowels has been largely based on North German practice. However, in today’s SG there is no distinction between [ê] and [ē] in open syllables; both are [e:].

Clearly, PD morphology was a somewhat reduced form of MLG morphology, having lost the genitive completely and the dative-accusative distinction in the neuter and feminine, as well as in the plural. On the other hand, PD morphology indicates a degree of leveling, resulting in less ambiguity with the elimination of multiple forms for the same gender/plural-case combination. In these cases of reduction and simplification PD resembles Dutch of the time. Franck (1910) provides the following definite articles for Middle Dutch (MD), representing the written Dutch of the 13th through the 15th centuries (compare also Van Loey (1980) for the forms of definite articles in MD):

Table 5. Paradigm of definite articles in Middle Dutch (MD) (Franck 1910:182)

	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	die, de	die, de	dat	die, de
Gen	dies, des	dier, der	dies, des	dier, der
Dat	dien, den	dier, der	dien, den	dien, den
Acc	dien, den	die, de	dat	die, de

Undoubtedly the Dutch varieties spoken by the Mennonites when they began their migration to West Prussia reflected, as dialects, the remarkable deflection that had taken place in MD. It is thus not surprising to see that the PD recorded by Quiring, which as he argues had remained essentially the same for hundreds of years, does not have the same number of definite articles and has lost the genitive. As with the sound system, PD has a clearly distinct paradigm of definite articles that sets it apart from either MLG or MD.

Much more can be said about PD morphology, its verbal, adjectival and nominal morphology, but we leave those details for another study. The morphology of the definite articles suffices as evidence of the unique character of PD, the feature that we wish to underscore in our presentation.

3.5 Lexical changes in the developmental stage: borrowings from contact languages

In line with what we have been presenting and arguing about PD phonology and morphology, lexical changes through borrowing from contact languages was very limited, whether in West Prussia or Russia. The separateness of their lifestyle, from daily life to Sunday worship, did not require a high degree of interaction with group-external individuals or organizations. In addition, once the Mennonites entered Russia, interaction with the native population, both Russian and Ukrainian, was kept to an absolute minimum, not only because the Mennonites lived in largely self-sufficient villages, they also did not hold their outside neighbors in high regard.

Epp (1993:92-93) discusses just five words that were borrowed from Russian, Ukrainian and German but mentions that there are many more. Siemens (2012:203-219) lists and provides details on Low Prussian (13 examples), Baltic (18), West Slavic (approx. 50), East Slavic (over 100) and other borrowings. He also includes a list of borrowings from Dutch, even though Dutch was the native language of the Mennonites before their migration to the Vistula Delta. His reasoning is that they differ from the words used in the local variety of Low German spoken in the Vistula Delta and thus were borrowings to this region. Most lexical items listed in both works are nouns and belong to the classes food (e.g. *Beklezháun* < Russian *baklažan* ‘tomato’), technical equipment (e.g. *Pesetjel* < Lithuanian *posėkelis* ‘sledge’), or daily household items (e.g. *Diwán* < Russian *divan* ‘couch’).

If we assume that PD had upwards of 50,000 lexical items that can safely be classified as native to the language at the point the Mennonites left the Vistula Delta for Russia (once the developmental stage, as it is called here, had generated a distinctive spoken language), then the percentage of borrowings was well under 1%. Of course, this does not take into consideration which words had the highest frequencies, but such measurements are impossible to determine. We can only speculate that borrowings were generally used less than native words. In any case, the borrowings themselves were not a significant factor in the formation of either the phonology or morphology of PD, but the contact with speakers of Baltic and Slavic, as discussed above, caused certain shifts. We thus should not dismiss certain phonetic features and phonological processes induced by or inherent in these contact languages. One that has been discussed quite extensively is the influence of the Russian palatalized /t/ which quite certainly influenced the pronunciation of PD speakers who were conversant in Russian. This influence may be one factor in some speakers favoring the pronunciation /tjoatj/ over /kjoaki/ ‘church’, or /tjinja/ over /kjinja/ ‘children’, for instance. We will return to this discussion in §4 where data from current speakers in Kansas and Oklahoma will be analyzed.

3.6 The state of Plautdietsch syntax in the developmental stage

The research literature gives very little help with determining any significant changes occurring in the syntax of the varieties of MLG spoken by the Mennonites during their time in West Prussia or on the Russian steppe, mostly because this kind of research requires substantial texts, and these are lacking. It is not until the 20th century that we have sufficient texts and transcripts of oral production necessary for syntactic analysis. In §4 we take up the body of research by Kaufmann (2015), who provides in-depth analyses of changes occurring in PD syntax as spoken by colonies or communities in South America, Mexico and Texas in the past couple of decades. If we use the earliest texts provided by Mennonites, those from the early 20th century (Quiring 1928), as a document of PD as it was spoken on the Russian Steppe, we have no basis for assuming there was significant variation in the pillars of PD syntax, which are the same for all of continental West Germanic: i) the vast majority of main clauses are verb-second (requiring verb raising), with a variety of elements in the left periphery (subjects, adverbs, VP-arguments, etc.), ii) embedded clauses are verb-final, with only limited extra-position to the right of the right sentence bracket; differences in the ordering of elements in clause-final verb clusters is the primary area with dialectal variation. It is not until quite recently that we find V3 in main clauses and V2 in embedded clauses. Further discussion of the variation in today's PD will be taken up in §4. In this section we simply note that such variation was much more limited in PD prior to the migration out of Russia.

In brief, there is no convincing reason to believe that PD in whatever form, in whatever colony, underwent any major syntactic shifts that would resemble the comparatively large phonological or even the very minor morphological changes discussed earlier. From the earliest times until very recently (see Wiese 2013, te Velde 2017, and sources cited by them for discussion of recent changes) all varieties of West Germanic have remained syntactically stable over time. The variation in PD verb clusters evident today can also be found historically; it also exists in dialects of German. Similar variation is also possible even in standard (written) Dutch.

PD has always offered more syntactic flexibility than any of the related standard languages, according to Siemens (2012:197-199), who provides three constructions that PD has either preserved from earlier periods or adopted from Slavic languages or Yiddish. The first is the use of negation with the complementizer *bit* which in SG requires the addition of 'mehr': *Etj bliew, bit etj die nich seeh* (SG *Ich bleibe, bis ich dich nicht mehr/*nicht sehe* 'I'll stay until I no longer see you').¹³ The second is double, or even triple negation as in: *Tjeena weet nuscht nich* (SG **Keiner weiß nichts nicht =Keiner weiß etwas* 'No one knows

¹³ For further discussion see Duden (2009:§1443) where it is pointed out that if the reading of *bis* is the same as *solange* 'as long as' with an anterior reading of the main clause, then the embedded clause may have negation without *mehr* 'more'.

anything’), and the third, various types of impersonal constructions, which in SG are now outdated, such as: *Mie ohnd aul waut* (SG *Ich ahnte schon etwas* ‘I sensed something’)¹⁴. The hypothesis that PD has preserved centuries-old constructions rather than borrowed them from Slavic or Yiddish is supported by the sociolinguistic fact that the Mennonites lived apart, in self-contained, tight-knit communities, as discussed in §2.

3.7 Summary and conclusion

In this section we considered the historical development of PD linguistic features, concluding that this variety, as a descendant of West Germanic, acquired a unique status setting it apart from Dutch, German and other varieties of Low German. PD has always been a spoken variety. The lack of standardization in any respect has its roots in the low rate of literacy of its speakers in the early years, but also in the fact that it served the purpose of communication in daily life and not in formal spheres, where Dutch and German filled the need. In this state of affairs, PD never had the chance to become standardized, neither its pronunciation nor its spelling, and was always in the shadow of these other dominant languages.¹⁵ This role as a spoken variety is one additional reason why its phonetics and phonology remained in flux and why, for instance, there are so many allophones of some phonemes, and why the pronunciation did not stabilize as much over time in tight-knit speech communities as would be the case in speech communities that emulate a spelling pronunciation, as has been the case in the history of German.

4. A LINGUISTIC SKETCH OF PLAUTDIETSCH AS SPOKEN IN NORTH AMERICA TODAY

In this section we present some recent developments in PD, in the attempt to identify their underlying sociolinguistic and formal factors. We first present a comparison of the consonant systems of PD and Standard German in order to establish a baseline for understanding how PD differs from German, despite the long-lasting language contact. Further, we describe differences between European PD and its North American forms, based on a comparison of Siemens (2012) and

¹⁴ Further research is required to determine whether today’s speakers of PD use expressions like this one more commonly than today’s speakers of SG use similar expressions, such as *Mir schwant etwas*, which states something very similar and also requires a dative subject. Dative subjects are not foreign to contemporary SG, as in *Mir ist kalt*, ‘I’m cold’, but they are generally holdovers from an earlier time.

¹⁵ Although MLG became the language of the Hansa and thus achieved a level of standardization for several centuries, the Mennonites never used MLG for formal purposes as they did written Dutch and German, since the Hansa went into decline in the late 17th century and thus its language never achieved the status of the other two. For further discussion see Epp (1993).

Cox et al. (2013). Finally, we show in more detail differences and similarities between the two Plautdietsch varieties in western Kansas and Oklahoma.

4.1 A basic comparison of the consonant systems of Plautdietsch and Standard German

As a starting point for describing the PD of today in North America, it is useful to first of all consider how it stands apart from SG, which is the language that from the early to mid-19th century until emigration from Russia exerted the most influence on PD (recall the introduction of formal German instruction in the mid-19th century Russian colonies, see §2.2 and §3.4). Thereafter its influence continued to a significant degree – it was still the formal language of the Mennonites in Oklahoma until at least WWI, and later in some more isolated areas. In Oklahoma, English has replaced German, and the same shift is underway in Kansas (see §2.2). By contrast, German is still very much the formal language in South American and Canadian settlements. In South America the adoption of Spanish has progressed much more slowly, with the rate and degree dependent on many factors, see Cox (2013).

Because of the complexity of the migration patterns and the factors influencing sound shifts, we will focus on certain aspects of the sound systems for illustration purposes. We will see that yet today there are differences between PD speakers whose ancestors lived in the Chortitza colony, from which PD speakers in Canada came, and those whose ancestors lived in the Molotschna colony, from which the Mennonite emigrants came to Kansas and later generated the Oklahoma Mennonite settlements.

Before we focus on those differences, we need to be reminded of the most fundamental difference between SG and PD (which falls in the same category as Dutch, English, Frisian, and all Low German varieties) from the very beginning, which is the lack of any consonant shifts that were part of the High German Consonant Shift (referred to commonly as the Second Sound Shift, SSII) that occurred between 500 and 800 CE. During SSII, the following consonants shifted (ignoring the precise environments for simplicity's sake):

Table 6. High German Consonant Shift with Plautdietsch and Standard German examples (HG=High German¹⁶)

WGmc		HG	PD ¹⁷	SG	
p	→	pf/ff	<i>Piep, Peat</i>	<i>Pfeife, Pferd</i>	‘pipe, horse’
t	→	ts/ss	<i>Strot, twee</i>	<i>Straße, zwei</i>	‘street, two’
k	→	kx,x	<i>Kaun, Käk</i>	<i>K(h)anne, K(h)uchen</i>	‘can, cake’
d	→	t	<i>Däa, doone</i>	<i>Tür, tun</i>	‘door, to do’

ð/θ	→	d ₁₈	<i>dree, daut</i>	<i>drei, das</i>	‘three, the’

Some other salient features of PD, preserved from the Dutch and Low German varieties spoken initially by the Mennonites, include the following:

- PD [j] occurs where SG [g] occurs (see Table 7).
- PD [f,v] occurs where SG [b] occurs, as in PD *Foawen* vs. SG *Farben* ‘colors’.
- Final devoicing does not occur categorically as in SG, or has become phonemic.

Thus, past participles have a *je-* instead of a *ge-* prefix; these features are also evident on some infinitives and nouns:

Table 7. Correlation of [j] and [g] in Plautdietsch (PD) and Standard German (SG)

PD	SG		PD	SG	
<i>jebuare</i>	<i>geboren</i>	‘born’	<i>tjriee</i>	<i>kriegen</i>	‘get’
<i>jefroare</i>	<i>gefroren</i>	‘frozen’	<i>sinje</i>	<i>singen</i>	‘sing’
<i>jejäwe</i>	<i>gegeben</i>	‘given’	<i>Jebäd</i>	<i>Gebet</i>	‘prayer’
<i>jebroake</i>	<i>gebrochen</i>	‘broken’	<i>Jäjend</i>	<i>Gegend</i>	‘region’

Knowing the effect of SSII on German is useful for the analysis of today’s PD: whenever PD is spoken with a German pronunciation that resulted from SSII, we have evidence that the PD speaker has been influenced by German. This does not include borrowings from SG, such as *Zelt* ‘tent’ or *Zent* ‘cent’ which are pronounced with an initial /ts/, an affricate that would not otherwise occur, since it

¹⁶ The shift of k → /kx/, indicated in orthography with <h>, occurred only in the “highest” HG varieties, such as Swiss German.

¹⁷ As noted earlier, PD has no standard orthography. We will use the orthography of Thiessen (2003) in the remainder of this study, unless otherwise noted. For examples from western Kansas PD we will diverge from Thiessen with the notation of palatal [kj] rather than [tj] in order to avoid misrepresentation, but maintain all other features, e.g. Thiessen’s spelling of infinitive -e despite the fact that Kansas PD uses -en.

¹⁸ This last shift was more pervasive than the others, affecting the entire Germanic-speaking area of the continent but not the area north of the English Channel. Thus, it provides an isogloss separating PD from English.

resulted from SSII. As mentioned in §3, SG was learned to an ever-greater extent by the Mennonites in Russia for several reasons. It is not surprising that SG has had an effect on their pronunciation and borrowing. We will see a few examples of this below.

4.2 Features of the Plautdietsch sound system as realized in North American varieties

In the past 50 or more years a considerable amount of research has focused on the various varieties of PD (spoken mainly by descendants of the Chortitza colony) that are being maintained in North America. Cox et al. (2013) provide a detailed sketch of a variety as spoken in an Old Colony Mennonite settlement in Saskatchewan. Moelleken (1987, 1993) compares features of the varieties spoken in British Columbia and Mexico, and Brandt (1992) gives us a detailed description with extensive word lists of the Mexican variety. We hope to show that, as predicted on the basis of the histories of the Kansas and Oklahoma settlements outlined in §2, there are noticeable differences yet today between these varieties of PD that can be traced back to the Russian colonies from which the settlers came: Old Colony or New Colony.¹⁹ In the next section we turn to a comparison of Old Colony PD with “European PD” for the purpose of highlighting features of Old Colony PD, from which the PD spoken in southwestern Kansas stems.

4.2.1 Comparing Old Colony and European Plautdietsch

The vowel phonemes of PD that Siemens (2012:89) lists are: /e, ə, e, o, i, u, ā, ē, ǝ, ī, ū, ee, oo, ei, au, ea, oa/. His consonant phonemes listed on p. 91 are: /p, b, t, d, tj, dj, k, g, f, w, s, sch, z, zh, jch, j, ch, g, h, m, n, nj, ng, l, r, lj/. If we compare Siemens’ (2012) analysis of PD, for which he uses data from the varieties spoken in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, with the sketch of Old Colony PD presented by Cox et al. (2013), some interesting differences come to light. We will begin with this comparison on the assumption that the German varieties that Siemens documents are the most neutral in the sense that they have not come in contact with any non-Continental Germanic language since the migration out of Russia.

In Table 8 we list differences between the inventory of PD phonemes as analyzed by Siemens (2012) and Cox et al. (2013); below the table are discussion points on the comparisons.

¹⁹ An additional complexity with connecting the Oklahoma PD varieties with a source colony arises with the fact that some PD speakers are descendants of Mennonites who settled in Volhynian colonies and had no substantial contact with either the Old or the New Colony.

Table 8. Comparing the inventories of PD phonemes in Siemens (2012) and Cox et al. (2013)

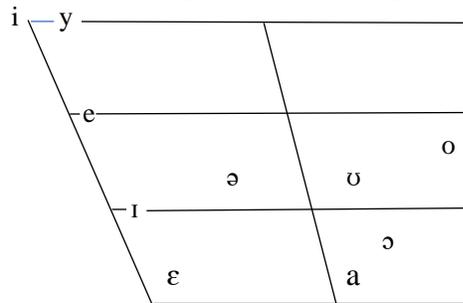
Siemens	Cox et al.
/ə/ and /ɐ/ are phonemes	/ə/ and /ɐ/ not listed (no discussion), see 1
/ā/ (= /a:/), but no /a/	only /a/ listed, but with discussion, see 2
/tj/, /dj/, /nj/, /lj/	/kj/, /gj/, /lj/, see 3
/i/ attested word-finally	/i/ attested word-finally, see 4
/ç/ and /x/ listed separately	/ç/ and /x/ listed separately, see 5
/ts/ occurs word-initially (onset)	/ts/ assumed as an onset, see 6
/oo/ listed, realized as [ou]	/oo/ not listed (nor /ou/)
four other phonemic diphthongs	eleven other phonemic diphthongs, see 7
no triphthongs listed	six triphthongs listed, see 8

Discussion points:

1. Siemens' assumption about the phonemic status of /ə/ and /ɐ/ breaks new ground; it is based on the observation that [ɐ] results from the lowering of /e/ in certain environments. Although he assumes that the phonological rule of r-vocalization applies in words like *Dea* vs. *Deare* 'door, doors' and those ending in /ar/, he states that it does not apply to /er/ when the following consonant causes lowering to [oa], as in *woare* 'become', related to SG *werden*. It also does not apply in *Born*, *Storm*, *Korf* 'fountain, storm, basket'. This evidence thus weakens the assumption that postvocalic /r/ is always realized as [ɐ], the rule in SG, as seen in e.g. *Sturm* [ʃtœm] 'storm', *Korb* [kœp] 'basket'. However, other minimal pairs in PD showing r-vocalization as in SG are: *wea* – *weare(n)*, SG *war* – *waren* 'was – were', *Foat* – *foaren*, SG *Fahrt* – *fahren* 'drive – to drive', *schwoa* – *schwierig* SG *schwer* – *schwierig* 'difficult/hard – difficult/complex'. Regarding Siemens' position on /ə/: it is a theory-internal assumption waiting for proof.
2. Cox et al. state that /a/, like /i, y, e, o, u/, may also have "quantitative" (length) distinctiveness.
3. Siemens' (2012: 90ff) treatment of palatalization is very detailed. The most fundamental difference from Cox et al. is the assumption that through palatalization /k/ becomes /tj/, which also eliminated the palatal /gj/ assumed by Cox et al.
4. Both Siemens and Cox et al. give *Baulj* /baʊli/ 'bellows' as an example; only the latter claim that in Canadian Old Colony Plautdietsch it contrasts with *Baul* /baʊl/ 'ball'.
5. The general assumption for German among phonologists is that there is one phoneme /ç/ that undergoes lowering to [x], an allophone, after back vowels and /a/. It appears that scholars have to date not made this same assumption for PD.

6. Cox et al. list /ts/ as the onset for *Zohl* (SG *Zahl*, ‘number’) and similar words. Siemens (2012:91) does not assume any phonemic affricates for PD, but he does point out that the combination [ts] occurs in loan words from SG (pronounced as an affricate), as well as in the PD numbers *zastich*, *zewentich* ‘sixty, seventy’. Our informants use *säwentich* with [z], as opposed to the [ts] attested by Siemens (2012:113).
7. The other diphthongs that Siemens lists are /ee/ realized as [eə], /ei/, realized as [ai], /au/, realized as [aʊ], /ea/, realized as [eə]. Cox et al. list “eleven phonemic diphthongs”: /ia /, /ya /, /ei /, /ea/, /eo /, /əi /, /əu /, /aʊ /, /oa /, /ua /, /ui /. This list does not include exact equivalents of Siemens’ /ee/ and /ei/, though /ea/ and /ei/ are very close. Most notably, it posits several diphthongs that are unaccounted for by Siemens.
8. Siemens does not discuss any triphthongs; Cox et al. list these: /əia/ in /bəia/ *Beea* ‘beer’, /əui/ in /jə’rəui/ *Jerooj* ‘movement’, /eəi/ in /veəi/ *Wäaj* ‘roads’, /iəi/ in /viəi/ *Weaj* ‘cradle’, /aui/ in /paui/ *Pauj* ‘paw’, /oəi/ in /boəi/ *Boaj* ‘mountains’.

Cox et al. (2013:224) provide the vowel phonemes and examples in Figure 2:



/i/	/bit/	<i>Biet</i>	‘a bite’	/a/	/bat/	<i>bat</i>	‘until’
/ɪ/	/bɪt/	<i>bitt</i>	‘bites’	/ə/	/bə’dit/	<i>bediedt</i>	‘means’
/y/	/byt/	<i>buut</i>	‘builds’	/ɔ/	/bɔt/	<i>Bott</i>	‘bid’
/e/	/bet/	<i>Bät</i>	‘a bit’	/o/	/bot/	<i>bodt</i>	‘bathes’
/ɛ/	/bɛt/	<i>Bett</i>	‘a tub’	/ʊ/	/bʊtst/	<i>butzt</i>	‘bumps’

Figure 2. Chart of Old Colony PD vowel phonemes (Cox et al. 2013:224)

The consonant phonemes and examples they give are the following:

Table 9. Old Colony PD consonant phoneme inventory (Cox et al. 2013:222)

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Palatoalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b		t d		k _j g _j	k g	ʔ
Nasal	m		n		ɲ	ŋ	
Affricate			ts	tʃ			
Fricative		f v	s z	ʃ ʒ	ç	x ɣ	h
Trill			r				
Approximant					j		
Lateral approximant			l		l _j		

/p/	/poa/	<i>Poa</i>	‘pair’	/k _j /	/kjoak _j /	<i>Kjoak_j</i>	‘church’
/b/	/boa/	<i>Boa</i>	‘bear’	/g _j /	/’ti.gja/	<i>tigja</i>	‘eager’
/m/	/moats/	<i>Moatz</i>	‘March’	/ɲ/	/’ε.ɲa/	<i>Enja</i>	‘ends’
/f/	/foa/	<i>foah</i>	‘Drive!’	/ç/	/’he.ça/	<i>hecha</i>	‘higher’
/v/	/voa/	<i>woah</i>	‘true’	/j/	/joa/	<i>Joah</i>	‘year’
/t/	/ji.’toa/	<i>Jitoa</i>	‘guitar’	/k/	/koa/	<i>Koa</i>	‘car’
/d/	/doa/	<i>doa</i>	‘there’	/g/	/goa/	<i>goa</i>	‘cooked’
/n/	/’noa.niç/	<i>noanich</i>	‘nowhere’	/ŋ/	/’hø.ŋa/	<i>Hunga</i>	‘hunger’
/ts/	/tsol/	<i>Zohl</i>	‘number’	/x/	/’pra.xa/	<i>Pracha</i>	‘beggar’
/s/	/’ma.sa/	<i>Massa</i>	‘knife’	/ɣ/	/dre.ɣa/	<i>Dröaga</i>	‘carrier’
/z/	/zot/	<i>Sot</i>	‘seed’	/tʃ/	/’kø.tʃa/	<i>Kutscha</i>	‘chauffeur’
/r/	/roa/	<i>roa</i>	‘Cry!’	/ʃ/	/’ʃoap/	<i>schoap</i>	‘sharp’
/l/	/lot/	<i>lot</i>	‘late’	/ʒ/	/’bø.ʒa/	<i>Buzha</i>	‘tousled head of hair’
/l _j /	/baol _j /	<i>Baulj</i>	‘bellows (N)’	/ʔ/	/’ʔoam/	<i>oam</i>	‘poor’
				/h/	/’hoa/	<i>Hoa</i>	‘hair’

The differences between the Siemens (2012) and Cox et al. (2013) inventories stem in part from differences in methodology and theory, but that is not the case with the lists of diphthongs and triphthongs. The greater number of diphthongs and the existence of triphthongs in Old Colony PD follow from the hypothesis that contact with another language will lead to greater volatility in a sound system. Another contributing factor is the lack of a standard orthography, which would have made the standardization of PD phonology feasible. For us the main issue is that both language contact and lack of standardization increase the challenges of the documentation, description and explanation of the new variety. Although we cannot take on the challenges of explanation here, we will in the remainder of this section address how the PD spoken in Kansas and Oklahoma compares and contrasts with what Siemens and Cox et al. have documented for their respective varieties.

4.2.2 The sounds of the PD spoken in Kansas and Oklahoma today

A comment of at least two of our informants in Oklahoma has been that even amongst the speakers within their community there are noticeable dialect differences.²⁰ This fact follows directly from the settlement history: The Mennonites who came to Oklahoma from Kansas did not all live in just one or two colonies in Russia (or were not descendants of just one or two). Although they tended to travel with the people they lived with there, once they arrived it was not typically possible to maintain the same groupings (see §2 on the dissolution of organizational structures). Nevertheless, it is apparent from our interviews that some, possibly most, of the features that distinguished their group are still present in their speech. Research is ongoing.

For the southwestern Kansas Mennonites, a similar model of community mixing can be observed. While a vast majority of immigrants came from Mexican colonies, there is also a considerable number of Mennonites from Canada, or other US states who are all descendants from the Russian Old Colony Mennonites, but vary in how long their families stayed in Canada or Mexico.

Two generalizations can be confidently made: 1) The set of sound features in the varieties of PD spoken in Kansas and Oklahoma that are similar is far larger than the set of those that are different, and 2) the set of differences stem to this day from the different colonies: Chortitza vs. Molotschna. Among some of the more noticeable sound differences between the Oklahoma and Kansas varieties of PD are the following:

1. The degree and manner of palatalization: for instance, our informants pronounce ‘I’ (Dutch *ik*, SG *ich*) in several ways: [ɪk, ɛkj, ɪtʃ, ɛtʃ]. Words that in West Prussian days began with a palatalized /kʲ/ are today palatalized as [tʲ] by Oklahoma PD speakers, descendants of the Molotschna colony, whereas in western Kansas the palatalization has remained as [kʲ] amongst descendants of the Chortitza colony. Thus, we hear /tʲoatʲ/ and /tʲinja/ in Oklahoma, but /kʲoakʲ/ and /kʲinja/ ‘church’, ‘children’ in Kansas.
2. /r/-realization: in both Kansas and Oklahoma, initial or post-consonantal /r/ before a stressed stem vowel is uniformly realized as [r] (voiced alveolar trill). In post-vocalic position /r/ is realized as either [ʁ], as we saw earlier, or if preceded by a syllable boundary or [ʁ], as [ɹ] (voiced alveolar approximant) in western Kansas (see §4.2.2.1 below). Further research is needed to determine whether /r/ is ever realized as [ɽ], a retroflex tap, as in Mexico, which may be a feature of a Dutch variety,

²⁰ Probably somewhat less surprising in one respect was the comment of a PD speaker in Oklahoma who had grown up in a Mennonite, PD-speaking community in Nebraska. When she heard a recording of a PD-speaker from Fairview, Oklahoma, she claimed she could only make out a few words. We suspect that the lack of intelligibility had more to do with the way PD has been maintained by some Midwestern speakers and the shifts that are occurring than with differences between PD varieties stemming from pre-North American periods.

preserved in an isolated West Prussian community and brought to Mexico, as argued by Moelleken (1993).

4.2.2.1 R-vocalization

Supporting the discussion in §3 and subsequent claims about /r/-vocalization, all of our speakers consistently employed this phonological rule, or for whatever reason pronounced [ɐ] in final position or preceding a consonant in words that in the equivalent SG words have <r> in the orthography but are also pronounced [ɐ]. Some of the pronunciations we have documented are the following:

Table 10. PD <a> where SG has <-er> or [Vr], both realized as [ɐ] or [Vɐ]

PD		SG		
[bɛtɐ]	<i>bäta</i>	[bɛsɐ]	<i>besser</i>	‘better’
[hɔɔt]	<i>hoat</i>	[hɑɔt]	<i>hart</i>	‘hard’
[lɛidɐ]	<i>leida</i>	[laidɐ]	<i>leider</i>	‘unfortunately’
[mɛ:ɔ]	<i>meea</i>	[mɛ:ɔ]	<i>mehr</i>	‘more’
[piət]	<i>Peat</i>	[pfɛ:ɔt]	<i>Pferd</i>	‘horse’

Table 11. Environments where /r/ is realized as [r] in western Kansas

[rutɪ]	<i>Rüten</i>	‘window pane’
[ˈfrɔɪ.fɪk]	<i>Freestitj</i>	‘breakfast’
[fɛ.ˈrɛzɪ]	<i>veˈreise</i>	‘to take a trip’
[jɛ.ˈʏrɪlt]	<i>jegrüilt</i>	‘frightened, scared’
[ˈoʊn.drʌ]	<i>aundre</i>	‘other’
[bɛ.ˈʃri:vɪ]	<i>beˈschriewe</i>	‘to describe’

Table 12. Environments where /r/ is realized as [ɹ] in western Kansas

[ˈfoʊ.ɪ]	<i>foahre</i>	‘to drive’
[jɛ.ˈʃtaɪ.wɔn]	<i>jestorwe</i>	‘died’
[ˈɪ.jɔnt.wɔt]	<i>irjendˈwaut</i>	‘something’ (indef.)
[dʌɪç]	<i>derjch</i>	‘through’
[bɛ.ˈzaɪjɪ]	<i>beˈsorje</i>	‘to take care of’

4.2.2.2 Rounded front vowels

One very salient feature of PD is the comparatively limited inventory of rounded front vowels; in this respect it patterns with MLG and today’s Low German. The one notable exception is [y], heard primarily in the Chortitza variety, cf. Epp (1993:78), who does not include a source for this vowel and states that it can sometimes be heard in other varieties in alternation with the rounded back [u]. Thus, some speakers in one colony say e.g. [du:], [ju:], [hu:s], ‘you’, ‘of you-pl’, ‘house’, while others in the same colony say [dy:], [jy:], [hy:s]. Thiessen’s (2003) dictionary, documenting the Old Colony/Chortitza variety, lists only *dü, jü, Hü*

with the <ü> indicating [y:], while Zacharias (2009) lists only *du* but with the pronunciation indicated as [dy], likewise Hus with [hys]. Zacharias uses the spelling of the Low German Bible. The authors have indicated to us (p.c.) that their lexicon was designed and written with the Old Colony Mennonites in Latin America in mind. As with many aspects of PD, the state of high vowels illustrate the variation and lack of standardization that exists to this day, which might be increasing with the on-going influence of more recent contact languages.

In the Oklahoma variety of PD we have documented, the words *du*, *Hus*, *ut*, *nu* ('you', 'house', 'out', 'now') and similar words are pronounced with [u:].²¹ To date, we do not have any documented words pronounced with [y] in this variety. We cannot conclude, however, that this variety has no front, rounded vowels. So far we have recorded at least two instances of /ø/ and /œ/, in *Tjröse*²² 'cows' and *Töpptje* 'pot'. Thiessen (2003) has *Toppje* without the umlaut, presumably indicating a back, rounded vowel. By contrast, in the Kansas variety we have very clear documentation of the front, rounded [y:] in the words *rut*, *Minuten*, *jegrult*, *Hus* and *buten* ('out', 'minutes', 'scared', 'house', 'outside'). Our data thus correspond with what is predicted by the origins of the speakers: The Kansas speakers, as descendants of the Chortitza Colony, have the phoneme /y/ listed in the Cox et al. (2013) inventory, while the Oklahoma speakers, as descendants of the Molotschna Colony, do not and use /u/ instead, as documented by Siemens (2012) also, whose data come from descendants of this colony as well.

4.2.2.3 Diphthongs and triphthongs

A much-studied feature of PD is the somewhat larger inventory of diphthongs than either Dutch or German, likely a result of contact with numerous languages. Going beyond these, Cox et al. (2013) document several triphthongs as well. We turn in this section to a comparison of these elements as presented by Cox et al. with what we have documented in western Kansas and Oklahoma. The inventory of phonemic diphthongs presented by Cox et al. are as follows:

Table 13. Phonemic diphthongs in Canadian Old Colony PD (Cox et al. 2013:225)

/ia/	/bia/	<i>Bia</i>	'pillow case'	/əɪ/	/bəɪd/	<i>beed</i>	'Bid!'
/ya/	/bya/	<i>Buua</i>	'builder'	/əʊ/	/bəʊd/	<i>Bood</i>	'shack'
/eɪ/	/beɪd/	<i>beid</i>	'both'	/aʊ/	/baʊs/	<i>Bauss</i>	'boss'
/ea/	/bea/	<i>Bäa</i>	'berry; pear'	/oa/	/boa/	<i>Boa</i>	'bear; drill'

²¹ *Dume* 'thumb' is pronounced by at least one Oklahoma speaker with [oʊ], indicating not only lowering but also diphthongization. Siemens (2012) and Thiessen (2003) both document /u/ [u:] in this word. Further research is needed to determine whether this one data point is part of a larger shift. If so, it would indicate the need for a reassessment of the entire phoneme inventory in Oklahoma.

²² As noted below, this word is not in any PD dictionary and thus seems to be a coinage of the Oklahoma speakers of PD (or of a particular community).

/eə/	/'beə .yən/	<i>Böagen</i>	'bow'	/ua/	/vua/	<i>wua</i>	'where'
				/ui/	/fuj/	<i>fuj</i>	'Yuck!'

It is pointed out that other studies of Canadian PD have different inventories, and that there are allophones of these. For instance, the /a/ off-glide is sometimes reduced to [ə], and /ui/ is restricted to a single word *fuj* 'Yuck'. The phonemic triphthongs they have documented are:

Table 14. Phonemic triphthongs in Canadian Old Colony PD (Cox et al. 2013:226)

/əia/	/bəia/	<i>Beea</i>	'beer'	/iəi/	/viəi/	<i>Weaj</i>	'cradle'
/əui/	/jə'rəui/	<i>Jerooj</i>	'movement'	/aui/	/paui/	<i>Pauj</i>	'paw'
/eəi/	/veəi/	<i>Wäaj</i>	'roads'	/oəi/	/boəi/	<i>Boaj</i>	'mountains'

Our documentation of diphthongs and triphthongs in western Kansas has produced the following inventory:

Table 15. Diphthongs in western Kansas PD

/ia/	/bia/	<i>Bia</i>	'pillow case'	with the allophones [ia, iə, iɐ]
/ya/	/bya/	<i>Buua</i>	'farmer'	with the allophones [yɐ, yə]
/eɪ/	/beɪd/	<i>beid</i>	'both'	with the allophone [eɪ]
/ea/	/bea/	<i>Bäa</i>	'berry; bear'	with the allophones [eɐ, ɛa, ɛɐ]
/aɪ/	/tvaɪ/	<i>twee</i>	'two'	
/ɔɪ/	/bɔɪd/	<i>beed</i>	'bid'	with the allophone [œɪ]
/oa/	/kjoakj/	<i>Kjoakj</i>	'church'	
/oʊ/	/ʃoʊl/	<i>School</i>	'school'	with the allophone [æʊ]
/ua/	/vua/	<i>wua</i>	'where'	with the allophone [uɐ]
/ui/	/fui/	<i>fuj</i>	'Yuck!'	with the allophone [yi] ²³

Discussion points:

1. We have indicated certain allophones involving the variation between [e] and [ɛ] in the onset of the allophone. Cox et al. (2013) do not discuss any allophonic variation of this kind, but it is noteworthy that they list no phoneme with the onset /ɛ/ (though they do assume that both /e/ and /ɛ/ are phonemes).
2. There is a noticeable tendency amongst the western Kansas speakers to use fronted allophones of these phonemes, as noted with *fuj*. It also occurs with *School*, which one speaker pronounced [ʃæʊl], and with *beed*, which most

²³ Some speakers pronounced *fuj* with [ui], others with [yi]. Which is the phoneme has not yet been determined with certainty.

speakers pronounce as [bɔɪd] but at least one pronounced it [bœɪd]. For more on fronting in PD, see Burns (2015).

3. We have no [eɔ] or [ea], but instead [eɐ]; all are possible allophones of /ea/. We also have no /əɪ/ but instead [ɛɪ], a possible allophone, though we assume that both /e/ and /ɛ/ are phonemes.

The triphthongs we have documented differ quite significantly from those in Canadian Old Colony PD. They are:

Table 16. Triphthongs in western Kansas PD

[ɪʊə]	in <i>Buak</i>	‘book’
[ɪoə]	in <i>Doag</i>	‘day’
[ɛɪə]	in <i>Eia</i>	‘eggs’
[ɔɪə]	in <i>sea</i>	‘very’
[oəɪ]	in <i>Boaj</i>	‘hill, mountain’
[ɛəɪ]	in <i>Wäaj</i>	‘way, path’

We are not yet certain whether all of these are phonemic; the last one is very close to the triphthong /eəɪ/ that Cox et al. (2013) document. Otherwise, only one of our triphthongs appears to be identical to a triphthong in Canadian Old Colony PD, namely /ɛɪə/. The source of the differences remains to be determined. It might be due to inner-group variation, or to the contact situation the Kansas Mennonites experienced in Mexico. A larger data sample is needed from various communities to answer this question.²⁴

There are very few differences between the diphthongs and triphthongs documented (so far) in Oklahoma PD and those in Kansas. Worth noting is the raising of /o/ to /u/ for emphasis, as in the pronunciations [jua] for *joh* ‘yes’, and [dua] for *doa* ‘there’ in Oklahoma. As in Kansas, Oklahoma PD speakers also sometimes front [o] to [ø] or [ɔ] to [œ], the latter in *Töpptje* ‘pot’, noted above. Similarly, /ɑ/ is sometimes realized as /æ/ or /ɛ/, as in [hɛdə] for *haude*.

Another part of the story of rounded front vowels is the sometimes accompanying or otherwise independently conditioned lowering of an accented vowel (when compared to SG; whether lowering actually occurred depends on the source language, which could have been one of several different WGmc varieties, as outlined earlier). Additionally, the vowels are also sometimes diphthongized:

²⁴ Underscoring this point is the fact that Cox et al. (2013:222) base their phoneme inventory on the speech of just one individual representing a small community.

Table 17. Examples of diphthongized vowels in PD

PD		SG		
[møɪd]	<i>meed</i>	[my:də]	<i>müde</i>	‘tired’
[jɾəm]	<i>jreen</i>	[gɾy:n]	<i>grün</i>	‘green’
[əɪvə]	<i>äwa</i>	[y:bə]	<i>über</i>	‘over’
[nøɪdɪç]	<i>needijch</i>	[nø:tɪç]	<i>nötig</i>	‘necessary’
[møɪbəl]	<i>Meebel</i>	[mø:bəl]	<i>Möbel</i>	‘furniture’
[ʃøɪn]	<i>scheen</i>	[ʃø:n]	<i>schön</i>	‘beautiful, pretty, nice’

4.2.3 Plautdietsch morphology

For illustrating the state of PD morphology today we will once again use the definite articles. A comparison with the MLG and MD definite articles (Table 4) shows that today’s PD is on the one hand not as rich, but on the other, it indicates a leveling that has simplified the morphology, making it more regular and predictable. The definite articles provided by Thiessen (2003) are:

Table 18. PD definite articles (Thiessen 2003:xix)

	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	dee	dee	daut	dee
Acc	den	dee	daut	dee
Dat	dem/den	dee	dem/daut	dee

Our own set of definite articles varies only slightly from Thiessen’s (2003) and are virtually identical to the set provided by McCaffery (2008), who includes both *dän* and *däm* for both the accusative and dative of the masculine, a practice found in other sources as well. The use of <ä> instead of <e> spells out a pronunciation of the articles in the masculine accusative and dative that is distinct from the SG *den* and *dem*, which are pronounced with a long, tense [e:]. The PD <ä> is pronounced [ɛ]:

Table 19. Kansas and Oklahoma PD definite articles

	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	de	de	daut	de
Acc	dän/däm/de	de	daut	de
Dat	dän/däm/de	de	daut	de

In a comparison with the definite articles provided by Quiring (1928) listed in Table 4b, repeated below as Table 20, it is evident that today’s PD has not changed during the more than 140 years of residence in North America.

Table 20. PD definite articles in Quiring (1928:92)

	Masc	Fem	Neut	Plural
Nom	dê	dê	daut	dê
Dat	dēm	dê	daut	dê
Acc	dēn	dê	daut	dê

The existence and availability of these definite articles says little about how frequently they are put to use. In the usage of the PD speakers in Oklahoma, *dän* and *däm* rarely occur. Their frequency is higher among the southwest Kansas speakers, as we would expect, given the difference in the state of maintenance and hence proficiency between the two groups. This form of breakdown in proficiency – reflected in a weakening in the role of case morphology for marking grammatical function – is not surprising, given the high level of proficiency in English of the Oklahoma PD speakers, with English being a language that has almost no case morphology. Loss in proficiency must be kept distinct from case syncretism per se, however. Rosenberg (2003) documents case syncretism in contact situations with Russian, which in stark contrast to English, has very rich case morphology. Further research is needed into whether case syncretism is occurring in the PD spoken in the American Midwest, or whether attrition is the cause of lower frequency found with certain case morphemes. Supporting the syncretism position is the fact that the western Kansas speakers, who are also highly proficient in English but much more proficient in PD than the Oklahoma speakers, also use the reduced case forms in the accusative and dative in Table 19.

4.2.4 Maintenance and change in the syntax of Plautdietsch

Our data from the Oklahoma and Kansas PD speakers indicate convincingly that WGmc syntax has been maintained almost perfectly, despite the separation of more than 200 years from a continental WGmc speech environment, that is, from the time the Mennonites left West Prussia. The main parameters of this syntax are:

1. V2 main clauses, requiring finite verb raising to second position out of an OV base
2. Verbal complements (infinitives, participles, particles) in final position in main clauses
3. Verb cluster in final position in embedded clauses (with V_{fin} sometimes preceding other verbal elements as in Dutch)

Data that support the maintenance of V2 main clauses are:

(3)

- a. dependent infinitive in final position

Mien Haund es gaunss ... stiew woarde.
 my hand is completely stiff become
 ‘My hand has become completely stiff.’

- b. *wh*-question
 Woa learsd du daut?
 Where learned you that?
 ‘Where did you learn that?’
- c. fronted temporal adverb
 Nu kaunst du dien Famielje beschriewen.
 Now can you your family describe
 ‘Now you can describe your family.’

A feature of PD syntax that is also found in other dialects of WGmc and North Germanic is the use of verb-third with certain fronted adverbials or discourse connectives. We have documented the following such constructions, among others:

- (4)
- a. V3 with a fronted temporal adverbial
 Enn dee tachtentijch he deede en Enjlich predje.
 in the eighties he did in English preach
 ‘In the eighties he preached in English.’
- b. V3 with a fronted discourse particle
 Soo etj deed met daut halpe.
 so I did with that help
 ‘So I helped with that.’

4.2.5 Periphrastic *do*

Dialects of West Germanic are known for their more extensive use of periphrastic *do* than SG, see Weber (2018) for a recent investigation. His research shows that Northern German dialects have a much greater frequency of periphrastic *do* in embedded clauses, and Southern German dialect speakers prefer using periphrastic *do* in main clauses; central dialects have this *do*-form in both types of clauses. According to Duden, the prescriptive grammar of SG, the only acceptable form of periphrastic *do* is the one that occurs with a fronted infinitive, as in these generic examples:

- (5) Periphrastic *do* in SG
- a. Tanzen tun wir wenig heutzutage.
 dance do we little nowadays
 ‘We dance little nowadays.’
- b. Lesen tue ich gerne am Abend.
 read do I gladly on-the evening
 ‘I like to read in the evening.’

Our informants generated a considerable variety of constructions with periphrastic *do* in both main (V2 or V3) clauses and in embedded clauses. First, some examples from the western Kansas variety:

- (6) Periphrastic *do* in western Kansas PD
- a. V2 main clause, present
 Ekj doo Kjinja too'seehnen.
 I do children to-see
 'I look after kids.'
- b. V3 main clause, past
 Enn soo ekj deed fresch moaken fa de Kjinja.
 and so I did fresh make for the children
 'And so I freshened up for the kids.'
- c. V2 main clause with prepositional complement
 Ekj do en Buak läsen toom nodem op'paussen.
 I do a book read to-the after-them out-look
 ...embedded V-final clause, present
 ... wan dee büte späle doone.
 when they outside play do
 'I read a book while looking after them, when they play outside.'
- d. V-final embedded, present
 (Enn dan huppst de Pogg rüt to de Band)
 and then hops the frog out to the band
 waut doa deit späle.
 which there does play
 'And then the frog jumps out towards the band that is playing there.'
- e. Causative construction in embedded clause
 Ekj jleich to läsen wan ekj de Kjinja büten
 I like to read when I the children outside
 spälen doo.
 play do
 'I like to read when I let the kids play outside.'
- (7) Periphrastic *do* in Oklahoma PD
- a. V-final embedded, past
 ... woa etj deed opp'wause.
 where I did up-grow
 '...where I grew up.'
- b. V1, V2 main clause, present
 A: Deist du uck a besstje koake? B: He deit äte!
 do you also a bit cook he does eat
 A: 'Do you cook a little, too?' B: 'He eats!'
- c. V2 main clause, past
 Dee deede dee Boom auf'schniede.
 they did the tree off-cut
 'They cut down the tree.'

In his study of West Texas PD, Kaufmann (under review) presents data to support the argument that constructions like (6d) and (7a) involve verb phrase raising, sometimes accompanied by Topicalization. We will not take up the question of what dislocations occur (if any) in these particular constructions but only note that verb clusters are highly variable in the dialects of today's WGmc languages. Even in standard Dutch, there is (acceptable) variation between V1-V2-V3 and V3-V2-V1. With respect to the functional and discourse features of periphrastic *do*, we will only state that our data do not support one or the other analysis conclusively. For instance, van der Horst (1998) argues that periphrastic *do* in Dutch originated in causative constructions such as (6e), but other studies such as Cornips (1998) point to habitual actions in a variety of Dutch, i.e. Heerlen Dutch, as in (7b), while others, for instance Nuijstens (1962:155) argue that periphrastic *do* in Dutch offers an advantage for handling complex verbs such as *opp'wauasse* in (7a).²⁵

Similar to Cornips, Nieuweboer (1999) observes that Altai Plautdietsch uses periphrastic *do* in habitual events but also with inchoative verbs like *oopmoake* ('to open'). Additionally, he discusses the effects of intense language contact with Russian, i.e. periphrastic *do* occurs frequently with phonologically adapted Russian verbs that are lexical borrowings into Plautdietsch, and is even obligatory for those that are not adapted to the target language. This, he argues, can be attributed to an avoidance strategy: the conjugation of *do* instead of the lexical verb. His approach thus resembles Nuijstens in parts. Looking at Plautdietsch varieties in the Americas, Kaufmann (under review) also finds the use in habitual (but also in progressive) contexts. Additionally, he presents data where periphrastic *do* is used in its indicative form to mark subjunctivity in certain conditional clauses. From this brief summary, it becomes clear that periphrastic *do* differs per variety, but also shares some features. More data must be collected for Plautdietsch before it can be determined which analysis gains support.

Another parameter of Continental WGmc syntax, Topicalization to the left periphery (of elements other than *wh*-items), is very difficult to document amongst the Oklahoma PD speakers, another potential sign of attrition. Amongst the PD speakers in western Kansas, a common type of Topicalization involves periphrastic *do* with a fronted infinitive, which as noted earlier is the most acceptable form of periphrastic *do* in SG as seen in (5):

²⁵ Nuijstens gives these examples from Dutch: *kopjeduikelen* 'to turn somersaults', *bokspringen* 'to (play) leapfrog', *zandhappen* 'to bite the dust', *stofzuigen* 'to vacuum' and states, "Is het bijv. *duikel kopje* of *kopjeduikel*; *spring bok* of *bokspring*..." [Is it e.g. *duikel kopje* or *kopjeduikel*; *spring bok* or *bokspring*] (1962:155).

- (8) Topicalization of non-*wh*-items
- a. fronted infinitive, with periphrastic *do*
 Neie doo ekj väle Dach.
 sew do I many day
 'I sew many days/often.'
 - b. fronted inf+complement, with periphrastic *do*
 Dee Praising Worship leide daut deede see.
 the praising worship lead that did they
 'They led the praising workshop.'
 - c. fronted inf. VP with periphrastic *do*
 Vleijcht sinje fe ons eensjemol deit dee Jügend.
 maybe sing for us sometimes does the youth
 'Maybe the youth will sing for us sometimes.'

Discussion points on Topicalization and periphrastic *do*

1. All three of the constructions in (8) suggest that for whatever reason (to be left for future research) infinitives, with and without complements, along with adverbs which sometimes occur without subject-verb inversion (V3 in (6b)), are preferred over other elements for Topicalization.
2. At least one speaker preferred to use a resumptive pronoun, such as *daut* in (8b), generating a left-dislocated infinitival element. This strategy is also common in SG, Standard Dutch, and Frisian.
3. As (8b) indicates, PD is a verb-final language: the complement of the verb precedes the verb head.
4. We do not assume it is a coincidence that the combination of periphrastic *do* and Topicalization is the most common construction with Topicalization. What syntactic and pragmatic factors underlie this construction involves a more extensive investigation than can be undertaken here.

4.2.6 The role of English as the dominant language

We have documented numerous constructions that appear very similar if not identical to English constructions employing VP ellipsis with periphrastic *doone* (9a-b) or with *senne* (9c):

- (9) VP-ellipsis
- a. A: Hee deede daut drintje. B: Wie deede uck!
 he did that drink we did too
 A: 'He drank that.' B: 'We did, too!'
 - b. Enn Texas daut wausst sea sea enn daut deit
 in Texas that grew very very and that does
 noch emma.
 yet still
 'In Texas, it grew a lot, a lot, and it still does.'

- c. (A: Und sie leben alle noch?) B: Joh, dee send.
 and they live all yet yes they are
 A: ‘And they are all living yet?’ B: ‘Yes, they are.’

It is easy to analyze such constructions as copies of their English equivalents, but undoubtedly there are constraints on the use of such constructions in PD, just as there are in English. Formalizing these constraints potentially involves assumptions about PD grammar beyond the syntax of the main clause, such as pragmatic factors.

Also in the category of possible English influence is the use of accusative pronouns for subjects as a default in the Oklahoma variety, whereas PD (and SG) default to nominative:

- (10) Use of accusative pronouns
- a. A: Etj woa stoawe! Etj woa stoawe! B: Mie uck!
 I will die I will die me also
 A: ‘I’m going to die! I’m going to die!’ B: ‘Me, too!’
- b. Mien Brooda enn mie, wie mußte Wota hoohle.
 my brother and me we must water fetch
 ‘My brother and me, we had to fetch water.’

As with case syncretism and attrition discussed earlier, VP ellipsis and default case could be related to a process of attrition, but also to general case simplification or syncretism, which has historical precedents in WGmc grammar. Unique to the PD speech communities in North America (north of the US-Mexican border), however, is the surrounding dominant language English. If VP-ellipsis and accusative case default do not occur in the PD variety spoken in Mexico – a topic not yet addressed in the literature – then an English influence in whatever form, including a shift in the direction of English main clause syntax and the consequent shift in the case morphology, might be the source of these syntactic features. This is a topic for future research.

4.2.7 Syntactic variation and innovation in North American Plautdietsch

It would not be surprising if evidence of syntactic variation and innovation could be found that suggests at least the beginnings of some kind of syntactic shift, or what might look like a shift but is only the exploitation of options available in the broad framework of WGmc. Kaufmann (2015:118) presents data that could be used to support either the former or the latter, depending on how they are analyzed. Some examples are given in (11):

- (11) Examples from West Texas PD of Verb Phrase Raising with Topicalization in embedded clauses
- a. kos nich sehen **daut** ik **ha** en nüet Kleid
 can not see that I have a new dress
 an
 on
 ‘Can’t you see that I have a new dress on?’
 (USA-22; f/15/Engl)
- b. **wann** der **dät** den sine Arbeit dann kaun
 if he does the his homework then can
 her ... ice cream eten (USA-77; f/42/MLG)
 he ice cream eat
 ‘If he does his homework, then he can have ... ice cream.’

This construction type, which has a dependent clause with a finite verb in second position like a main clause, occurs in 53 of the 59 tokens of embedded/dependent clauses – either a complement, conditional or relative clause – in which the complement occurs after a finite verb (with no dependent verb). Kaufmann points out that dependent clauses of these kinds with a raised verb represent only 3.2% of his tokens from all speakers of PD in South and North America; thus, there are very few violations of the OV parameter for dependent clauses for which WGmc is known. However, if the data from the West Texas PD speakers is considered alone, the percentage is 8.4%. Kaufmann (2015:121) concludes:

“The informants in the United States show by far the highest share of the non-verb-final variant (8.4% of their tokens...)... Much contact with SHG [Standard High German], as in the Paraguayan colonies, correlates with very few non-verb-final tokens; hardly any contact with SHG, as in the US-American colony, correlates with a much higher number of non-verb-final tokens.”

This correlation does not, of course, lead us directly to the cause. Kaufmann initially argues against equating the operation that raises the finite verb to second position in main clauses with the one that raises the verb in embedded clauses, calling the embedded clause variant “superficial V2.” He presents an analysis that involves verb-projection raising and scrambling. Both of these operations are typical of main clauses in WGmc languages, but only scrambling is also possible in embedded clauses. In the end he comes to the conclusion, however, that the higher the percentage of V2 clauses in a variety of PD, the higher the likelihood that “superficial V2” will be reanalyzed as “structural V2.” Just how this reanalysis occurs precisely is not spelled out, but it is clear that Kaufmann sees the beginnings of a parametric shift in the North American variety of PD. We have recorded the same tendency. A small percentage of our speakers’ dependent clauses also indicate verb raising. We should note, however, that verb raising in *dass* (‘that’)-clauses and *weil* (‘because’)-clauses (occasionally also *obwohl* (‘although’)-clauses) occurs in

colloquial German within the German-speaking countries, especially in contemporary urban vernaculars (in other verb-second languages also). There is a rich body of research on this, e.g. Freywald et al. (2015).

Another study that explores syntactic variation in Plautdietsch and English in western Kansas is Hopp et al. 2018. They looked at *wh*-movement in simple questions and complex questions, i.e. across clause boundaries, in both languages, employing a production and a judgment task, and found that variation correlated with the age of onset of the contact language English. Speakers displayed three options for complex *wh*-movement:

1. long-distance: ‘Where do you think John is?’
2. medial *wh* (scope-marking): ‘What do you think where John is?’
3. medial *wh* (copy *wh*): ‘Where do you think where John is?’

The results showed a split of all speakers into two groups: late learners of English and early learners of English (heritage group). Crucially, while speaker groups did not differ in target production of simple questions (matrix and embedded), they showed group effects for the complex questions. The majority of all complex questions were target-like; however, all medial *wh*-questions in English were produced by late learners of English, and all medial *wh*-questions in Plautdietsch were produced by heritage speakers of Plautdietsch.

Since Plautdietsch licenses medial questions, but English does not, transfer between languages would predict a higher occurrence of medial questions in the late learner group, independent of the language, and no (or low) occurrence in the heritage group, due to English dominance. The group results, however, show that medial *wh* only surfaces in the less dominant language. Hopp et al. (2018) attribute these effects to derivational complexity and argue that the processing of complex *wh*-movement is reduced through the mechanisms of medial *wh*-movement, while simple questions do not pose such complexity in processing on the speaker. This recent study enters new territory for Plautdietsch, and further research for comparison is necessary to determine the role of the contact language for such complex constructions.

5. CONCLUSION

The evolution of Plautdietsch out of a Dutch/Low German base beginning in the late 16th century demonstrates a number of properties of language per se and the speech community served by a language. The unique history of the Mennonites as a separatist religious community who left their original speech environment and lived largely apart provides an interesting demonstration of how language can be maintained largely intact, serving this or that purpose. Equally clear from the study of PD, however, is the inevitability of language change. Even though the Mennonites lived in tightly structured villages and led a lifestyle that did not require substantial interaction with non-PD-speaking people, the limited encounters with

these people left a mark – at first a very small one – on their language. More noticeable changes in their ethnic language occurred once the Mennonites began integration with the surrounding non-Mennonite, non-PD-speaking people. This process did not occur in Russia; the surrounding environment and people were never perceived as compatible with their own. The situation changed when the Mennonites settled in Kansas in 1874, less so with the other settlements. The differences between Kansas (later Oklahoma) on the one hand, and the other settlements in the New World on the other are due to social changes that occurred in the US (and Canada), such as the introduction of English as the medium for education, military service, and discrimination against their German heritage. Those Mennonites who came to Canada left the country before these changes could affect their communities, and settled in Mexico. For these reasons, SG has been learned to a much greater extent in the non-North American Mennonite groups, whereas in North America English – also a WGmc language – has been adopted as the standard language. Parallel to this linguistic change is the founding of new religious groups as a substitute for or complement to the traditional Mennonite religious groups such as the *Kleine Gemeinde*.

Predictably, the most noticeable linguistic changes have occurred in North America. Where the Mennonites have lived the longest with the greatest breakdown in their speech community, these changes are the greatest, namely in Oklahoma. But even in communities that were founded just 40 or 50 years ago – in western Kansas and Seminole, Texas – a few changes can already be identified. The prospects for the future survival of PD in North America depend, therefore, on the extent to which new arrivals from places like Mexico, where the maintenance of PD has been stronger, are able to refresh the existing PD usage, or on efforts, which are just beginning in Seminole, to undertake a conscious, overt maintenance program. More extensive instruction in SG would help maintain certain properties of WGmc syntax and phonology that lie at the basis of PD. However, this instruction could also lead to an ever greater adoption of SG into PD; evidence of this process can already be documented. Regardless of the direction that PD takes, it will for many decades, even centuries to come offer a rich area for linguistic research.

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