

REVIEWS

Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language. By Mark L. Loudon. (Young Center Books in Anabaptist and Pietist Studies). Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016. Pp. xxii, 473. Hardcover. \$59.95.

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1. Introduction.

Among the world's languages, Pennsylvania Dutch is spoken by relatively few people; yet its story is a “sociolinguistic wonder”—as Mark L. Loudon characterizes it in his recent book *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Loudon presents the story of this sociolinguistic wonder from its beginnings in Pennsylvania to its current status; he also offers a prognosis for the future. This volume represents the most in-depth and comprehensive study of the language to date. Given that the field of Pennsylvania Dutch studies is relatively small, a remark before my review is necessary. Although the author acknowledged me at the start of the book, I did not contribute to earlier drafts of it and strive here to present a fair and unbiased review.

2. Review of Content.

Chapter 1 begins by answering the question, what is Pennsylvania Dutch? This question is fairly easy to answer in a strictly linguistic sense. However, from the sociolinguistic point of view, the language has presented a number of challenges directly related to its sociolinguistic status. Like many minority languages, Pennsylvania Dutch was often cast in a negative light. The language is related to European German, which was viewed more positively, as a learned language of the elite. This created problems early in the history of Pennsylvania Dutch and beyond. Many early accounts (notably, Schöpf 1788) refer to Pennsylvania Dutch as a mix of German and English, refusing to acknowledge the language in its own right. Loudon refers to this stigma as an “image problem”. He relies on these popular misconceptions to describe linguistic issues of language and dialect, literary prestige,

contact linguistics, and to deal with issues of power related to standard languages. Rather than simply dismissing the misconceptions, Loudon aims to weave them into the story of Pennsylvania Dutch showing how the social context and “legitimacy” of a language can influence its use and future.

Chapters 2 through 6 cover the chronological history of Pennsylvania Dutch. Chapter 2 deals with its early history and the first descriptions of the language as the first generation of American-born Pennsylvania Dutch reach maturity. Loudon traces the earliest accounts of Pennsylvania Dutch by outsiders such as Johann David Schöpf (1788) to highlight public perception of the language and also of the people who speak it. Chapter 3 traces the tensions in the 19th century between the urban Germans of Philadelphia (*Deitschlenner*)—who were shifting to a monolingual use of English—and the Pennsylvania Dutch. In addition to outsider accounts, Loudon incorporates insider publications such as newspapers, which provided outlets for the promotion of Pennsylvania Dutch culture. These newspapers gave rise to literary traditions in Pennsylvania Dutch presented in chapter 4. Although by the turn of the 20th century, the use of Pennsylvania Dutch among its nonsectarian (Lutheran and Reformed) speakers was beginning to decline, the 19th century marked a golden age of Pennsylvania Dutch literature, with writers from within the culture such as Henry Harbaugh, Edward H. Rauch, and Abraham R. Horne, as well as outsider Ludwig A. Wollenweber. They are thoroughly presented biographically with their contributions to Pennsylvania Dutch.

Chapters 5 and 6 take the reader through the 20th century to the present day. Chapter 5 focuses on the literary landscape. Loudon outlines the literary traditions picked up by unsympathetic writers, such as Helen R. Martin, as well as other local-color writers and American literary regionalists. Their negative views competed with the efforts of the Grundsoew Lodges and the Pennsylvania Dutch Folklore Center to promote the language and culture of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Some of these efforts continue, but the life cycle of Pennsylvania Dutch is maintained largely by the Amish and Mennonites, who were historically the least numerous speakers of the language. Chapter 6 presents their ability to preserve the language as a strong marker of their identity. Loudon presents Pennsylvania Dutch as an American language. This is the thread that runs throughout the book, and to which he returns in the

concluding chapter. In addition to the text, Louden created an accompanying website (padutch.net) replete with audio recordings, lengthier text examples from the book, and information on resources about the language and its speakers.

3. Critical Evaluation.

Compiling the most in-depth treatment of Pennsylvania Dutch is no small task, yet Louden achieves this feat. The book is accessible to academics within and outside of Pennsylvania Dutch studies, as well as to speakers of the language who want to know more about it. The accessibility of Louden's writing and his clear explanations of linguistic terminology (especially in chapter 1) echo the implicit goal of his book: to inform both the academic and nonacademic readership. His choice of the term *Pennsylvania Dutch* for the title—the name of the language preferred by the (mostly) rural people who speak it—symbolizes the book's broad accessibility.

On the whole, the text is about tension. One of the most important and pervasive conflicts addressed in the first half of the book is between the Deitschlenner (the German speakers) and the Pennsylvania Dutch. The discussion evokes the familiar oppositions between urban versus rural and literary versus oral. Yet those earliest tensions between the two linguistic communities need not define Pennsylvania Dutch today. As Louden justly points out at the end of the book, "Pennsylvania Dutch is healthiest among those sectarian groups who continue to use German in worship" (p. 359). The two languages are thus intimately linked, even though their relationship was problematic for much of Pennsylvania Dutch's earliest history. Other tensions highlighted in the book have to do with the legitimacy of Pennsylvania Dutch and its emergence as a literary language with an orthography. Yet another source of tension is the shift from nonsectarian dominance in speaking Pennsylvania Dutch to sectarian dominance. On the one hand, historically, the nonsectarians were numerically the largest group of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers. They have since become the group that is trying to maintain the language through various revival and maintenance efforts. On the other hand, the nonsectarians have become the group that actively maintains Pennsylvania Dutch. Arguably, this group has become most associated with the language heritage in the public consciousness.

Louden's work on Pennsylvania Dutch as a "portable language"—the term borrowed from Reschly 2000 and Keiser 2012—plainly shows that Pennsylvania Dutch, despite its name, is diasporic. Although the text presents the usual sectarian/nonsectarian dichotomy of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers, Loudon attends to speakers of the language who have received considerably less attention, for example, African Americans, Romanies, and others. In addition, his discussion of the conservative Swartzentruber Amish reveals a serious gap in the scholarship and draws the reader into the actual diversity of Pennsylvania Dutch's sectarian speakers.

Contributing to the portability of language, the internet resource (padutch.net) is an important aspect of the book's content, which is not to be overlooked. Indeed, being fluent in Pennsylvania Dutch, Loudon has recorded some of the texts himself. The site will undoubtedly serve as a clearinghouse for valuable information on the language.

Perhaps most impressive is the incorporation into the analysis of Pennsylvania Dutch writings. Loudon includes not only linguistic information, but also contextual and interactional information. He invokes Nolt's (2002) idea of peasant republicanism to explain the negotiation of Pennsylvania Dutch identities and language use. How can a group of Americans be so patriotic, yet isolate themselves from mainstream American Anglophones? By incorporating texts, particularly poetry, written by the Pennsylvania Dutch and in their own language, Loudon shows that the content of their writings was not isolationist. They wanted the freedom to maintain their distinctive culture and recognized that freedom was granted to them in their adopted homeland. Long-held misconceptions about the roles of the Pennsylvania Dutch in American history are brought to light, and their own voices given back to them. Importantly, Loudon is not uncritical of this aspect of the problem—as Western Europeans, the Pennsylvania Dutch were tolerated to a large extent, while other cultures and languages in the United States were and are not.

Early accounts of Pennsylvania Dutch by outsiders claimed that the speakers created bizarre forms, which in many cases are perpetuated through artifacts of tourism. Yet Loudon fills the book with a great many Pennsylvania Dutch writings. In so doing, he empowers the speakers of Pennsylvania Dutch to share the story of their language, something that is lacking from many scholarly accounts. As part of this empowerment,

he shows that the language of the Pennsylvania Dutch was not limited to rural idylls but was used to discuss a wide variety of issues. From Loudén's analysis of poems about schooling, for example, the Pennsylvania Dutch emerge as prominent voices in larger political discussions at the time than was previously thought. The primary sources point to changing attitudes toward Pennsylvania Dutch as the reader is taken through a narrative timeline of the language's history. Indeed, this narrative begins at a *fersommling* with elderly Harry and Ida in Pennsylvania, and young sectarians Harvey and Ada Mae in Oklahoma being dropped off after shopping. Invited into Harry's, Ida's, Harvey's, and Ada Mae's cultural and linguistic spaces, one traces the story of Pennsylvania Dutch along with them through the text. Loudén's book is a welcome addition to Pennsylvania Dutch studies and heritage language research.

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