

***Pennsylvania Dutch:
The Story of an American Language***

MARK L. LOUDEN

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What are the linguistic roots of Pennsylvania Dutch? Are those roots to be found in the Netherlands, or do they lie somewhere further south? If the latter, should we call the language Pennsylvania *German* instead of Pennsylvania *Dutch*? And is it really a language, or is it better to think of it as a dialect? These are just a few of the questions Mark Louden addresses in his new book, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Thoroughly researched, sweeping in scope, and attentive to both linguistic concerns and historical currents, Louden's book provides both an overview of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers and their culture and a detailed analysis of the language itself. Although some readers may wish for a less thoroughgoing treatment of the subject, scholars from an array of disciplines, as well as nonscholars interested in Pennsylvania Dutch language and culture, will benefit from Louden's careful analysis.

Louden begins his book with a wide-ranging introductory chapter. Here readers encounter all the questions above and, more importantly, Louden's lucid answers to them. While acknowledging the Germanic roots of the language, Louden explains the reasons for calling it Pennsylvania Dutch, as well as the rationale for considering Pennsylvania Dutch an American language, not a German dialect. He contrasts Pennsylvania Dutch with more customary forms of German, and he outlines the various ways that Pennsylvania Dutch has interacted with English, both with respect to borrowing from English and with respect to

influencing the English spoken by Pennsylvania Dutch speakers. Along the way he responds to critics who have dismissed Pennsylvania Dutch as a contemptible linguistic mongrel, far inferior to its supposedly purer counterparts (Louden's refutation of these charges constitutes one of the book's primary themes). He concludes his introduction with the question, "Who Speaks Pennsylvania Dutch?" the answer to which presages another key theme: the simultaneous loss (among nonsectarians) and endurance (among religious sectarians) of the language.

The next four chapters are chronologically ordered, though not rigidly so. Chapter 2 considers the early history of the language—its genesis in southeastern Pennsylvania in the third quarter of the eighteenth century, its reputation among other Americans (both German-speaking and Anglo-Americans), and its emergence in print in the late eighteenth century, often in the form of "Dutchified German." Chapter 3 covers the first half of the nineteenth century, which Louden suggests "was a crucial period for the formation of a unique folk culture centered on the Pennsylvania Dutch language" (119). Although some German-American elites encouraged a full-scale embrace of English, Pennsylvania Dutch speakers resisted that move, a resistance that was abetted by German-language newspapers that devoted space to those "who were inclined to set their beloved native language to paper" (178). At the same time, even in the first half of the nineteenth century, Pennsylvania Dutch speakers became increasingly literate in English, often at the expense of literacy in German.

Chapter 4, titled "Profiles in Pennsylvania Dutch Literature," focuses on the second half of the nineteenth century, when "the seeds of Pennsylvania Dutch literature . . . came into full bloom" (178). This literary flowering coincided with a peak population of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers—as many as 750,000 in the 1880s—but it also prefigured the language's decline among large segments of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers who, by moving to the city, pursuing professional lines of work, and marrying non-Pennsylvania Dutch speakers, began to lose their facility in the language. Not coincidentally, even as these partisans of Pennsylvania Dutch language and culture became less proficient in Pennsylvania Dutch, outsiders' interest in the culture—not only its language but also its food and folkways—took to new heights. This interest constitutes the focus of Louden's fifth chapter, which once again highlights the work of the language's defenders against those who considered it inelegant, even comical.

Chapter 6, titled "Pennsylvania Dutch and the Amish and Mennonites," brings the story of the Pennsylvania Dutch language to the present, with the focus on religious sectarians who continue to speak

it. Whereas much of the book's second half is a story of attenuation, this chapter offers an account of resilience. Because of their devotion to rurality and endogamy, and their relatively limited social and geographical mobility, Old Order Mennonites and Amish have maintained a language that, for all practical purposes, has disappeared among other twenty-first-century Americans. Indeed, writes Loudon, "the incredible vitality of Pennsylvania Dutch in Old Order communities as far flung as Maine, Florida, Texas, Colorado, and Montana, whose populations are doubling every twenty years, suggests a bright future for the language" (354). For these Old Order sectarians, who have little interest in being affirmed and accepted by their more worldly neighbors, the Pennsylvania Dutch language constitutes a key pillar by which to uphold their religious separatism.

This cursory summary of Loudon's book hardly does it justice. Loudon is first and foremost a linguist, and he navigates that challenging terrain with aplomb. In addition to mapping the ways that early Pennsylvania Dutch diverged from more standard forms of German, he charts regional differences in the language itself, changes in the language over time, and in one particularly fascinating section, the language's degree of dependence on English "loanwords" (32-35). Part of what makes Loudon's book so lengthy is the very thing that makes it so valuable: it is filled with examples from the language that enable nonspecialists to see the points he is making. It is one thing to be told that Dutchified English sometimes resorts to "falling question intonation" (46-47) and quite another to see that intonation represented in print ("IS he though?"). Similarly, Loudon includes an abundance of primary source materials that illustrate lexical and grammatical features of the Pennsylvania Dutch language, materials that turn Loudon's monograph into a valuable reference work for students and educators alike.

Readers whose interests lie more in cultural history than in linguistics will also find much to appreciate. In addition to charting the back-and-forth between critics and devotees of the language, Loudon introduces his readers to a host of relatively obscure Pennsylvania Dutch writers who, like so many other turn-of-the-century writers, yearned for a past that they themselves had rejected. Less central to Loudon's argument, but perhaps more entertaining for his readers, is his consideration of Pennsylvania Dutch *fersommlinge* (gatherings), Groundhog Lodges, and even a Pennsylvania Dutch adaptation of the opera *H.M.S. Pinafore*, which premiered in Allentown in 1882 before traveling to other Pennsylvania towns and cities. These cultural expressions did nothing to impede the loss of Pennsylvania Dutch in everyday life among nonsectarian Pennsylvania Dutch people, Loudon admits. They did,

however, provide a space for nonsectarians to express their ethnic pride and, at the same time, mourn their linguistic loss.

One can always wish for something in a book that is not there, and in this case I found myself wishing for a glossary to keep my "Germans" straight. In particular, it would have been helpful to have a glossary that defined the following: *Pennsylvania Germans*, *German Pennsylvanians*, *standard German*, *Palatine German*, *High German*, *Low German*, *Pennsylvania High German*, *Pennsilfaanisch*, *Pennsylvania Dutch*, *Dutchified English*, and *Dutchified German*. Similarly, nonlinguists would be helped by a glossary covering terms such as *lexicon*, *syntax*, *phonology*, and *morphology*. That said, the book's index is both well conceived and thorough, and it provides a way to access most of the aforementioned terms with a little time and effort.

All told, *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language* is a splendid addition to the discipline of linguistics and, more specifically, to the field of Pennsylvania Dutch language and culture. A language this remarkable—thanks to its Old Order speakers, it is one of only a few heritage languages in America that is not endangered—deserves a first-rate book, and this is it. It will likely be unsurpassed for years to come.

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