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Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation to a Dominant Contact Language (American English) in German Linguistic Enclaves on the Great Plains

1 Introduction

Scholars of German settlement varieties in the United States, particularly in the Midwest, in the Upper Mississippi Valley and on the Great Plains, are clear on one point: Within the course of one or two future generations, the numerous linguistic varieties of German transplanted to the New World from Europe over the course of several centuries will be passing from existence. The only notable exceptions are to be found in the sectarian rural communities of Amish, Hutterian Brethren (Hutterites), and Mennonites, particularly those Mennonites having recently migrated to remote areas of the Great Plains from colonies in Mexico (Keel 2006: 163).

In the case of the communities of Amish and Hutterites, a variety of German, Pennsylvania German and South Bavarian, respectively, is preserved primarily because of its role in the religious life of these communities as well as their relative rural isolation. The Amish restrict access to the outside world through their rejection of electricity and telephone service as well as the automobile. The Hutterites live communally and operate self-sufficient farming colonies and also maintain their separateness from the outside world.

Mennonites immigrating to Texas, Kansas and other states from colonies in Chihuahua, Mexico, since the late twentieth century have continued to speak a variety of Low German (*Plautdietsch*) in their families and in worship services in their new settlements in the United States, but will very likely assimilate quickly to their American English environment within a relatively short period of time: They do not have a compelling reason to use this variety of German to preserve their religious life or group identity as do the Amish and the Hutterites. Our attention is therefore directed at other enclaves of German varietal speech.

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries witnessed the migration of tens of thousands of individuals, who spoke varieties of German as their native tongue, from their European homeland to the New World. Lured by the prospects of free or very cheap farmland by the U.S. government (e.g., the Homestead Act 1862) and the transcontinental railroad companies such as the Santa Fe and Kansas Pacific, Kansas became the destination for settlers coming from German colonies in the Russian and Austrian Empires following the American Civil War (1861-1865). The neighboring state of Missouri had already been largely settled in the several decades prior to 1860. Due to the exaggerated description of Missouri as ideal for German immigration by Gottfried Duden in 1829 (*Bericht über eine Reise...*), this state attracted German-speaking

immigrants who in part wished to establish an all-German state (Gießen Society 1834) as well as those such as the Old-Lutherans from the Kingdom of Saxony (1839) wishing to preserve their religious identity apart from the wave of Union churches in Prussia and neighboring German states.

In what follows, we will outline case histories of a number of these German settlements in Missouri and Kansas together with their maintenance of a German variety or dialect in the attempt to develop a model for the assimilation to English over several generations in these communities. In Missouri, we will follow the development of two Lutheran settlements. The first of these is located about one hundred miles south of the city of St. Louis along the Mississippi River in the easternmost part of the Ozark Mountains: Here the Saxon Lutherans established villages in 1839. Across the state about fifty miles east of Kansas City in Lafayette County we find the community of Concordia. Concordia is also largely German Lutheran, but the settlers came from northern Germany, many from the area of the Steinhuder Lake. These settlers also established their community in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

In Kansas, we will explore the history of three communities: in eastern Kansas along the border with Nebraska, we again find a large Lutheran settlement area in Marshall and Washington counties begun shortly before the Civil War where a variety of Low German was the lingua franca. In central western Kansas we find several communities of German Catholics centered in Ellis County. These Germans from colonies along the southern Volga in the Russian Empire began arriving in Kansas in the mid-1870s and maintained an intact settlement area up until the mid-twentieth century. Finally, in extreme northwestern Kansas, in Rawlins County, we find a settlement of Hungarian-Germans from the Austrian Empire coming largely in the 1880s centered on the town of Herndon where a Bavarian variety was spoken. Each of these five settlements has much in common with the others and each will have its distinctive characteristics in the process of assimilation to the dominant English culture and language.

2 Selected German Linguistic Enclaves

2.1 Saxon Lutherans in Eastern Perry County, Missouri



The Lutheran settlements in the southeastern corner of Perry County, Missouri, are the result of the immigration of over 600 Saxons who came to the United States via the port of New Orleans in 1838. These Saxons settled in a largely uninhabited area of the eastern Ozark Mountains bordered on two sides by the Mississippi River and hemmed in on the other sides by German Catholics with whom the Lutherans had only limited contact. With their focus on the village church in each settlement and the difficulty in traveling outside of their

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

settlements, these Saxons have been able to retain their German spoken variety into the early years of the twenty-first century. Interviews conducted in the fall of 2014 with a dozen members of this community confirmed that the oldest persons in these Saxon villages, all born prior to 1945, were able to converse and answer questions in their native variety with relative ease. It was also clear that the children of these oldest members of the Saxon community in Perry County had not acquired any real fluency in this variety of German. Thus, with the passing of this oldest generation in a few years, this settlement variety of German will cease to exist.

As late as 1970, over 70% of Saxon Lutherans of Perry County claimed German as their mother tongue. The retention of the native language in these Saxon Lutheran communities far exceeded the rate expected in such communities according to Glenn Gilbert (1981). The exclusive Lutheran parochial schools of these communities maintained instruction in German in many subjects exclusive of mathematics and science until the beginning of the First World War. Religious instruction in German survived well into the 1940s. Children still were learning German songs in the Lutheran schools into the 1970s. The use of German in the schools of the Perry County Lutherans began at embarkation in Bremen in 1838, continued on the voyage to New Orleans and was ensured by the establishment of a teacher's college at the newly settled village of Altenburg in 1839 shortly after the first settlers arrived. Another important factor in the retention of this particular variety of German was the homogeneity of the Eastern Perry County population. As Russell Gerlach noted in 1976 the "purest settlements, from a linguistic point of view, are the Lutheran settlements, and particularly the Saxon settlements in Eastern Perry County. In Eastern Perry County nearly everyone is a Saxon and speaks a Saxon dialect very similar to High German."

Perhaps just as significant for the long-lived retention of the native German variety in Eastern Perry County is the geographic isolation of the settlement. Given the choice between a large tract of fertile river valley land relatively close to the city of St. Louis and the smaller, hillier and less fertile land in Perry County, these Saxon Lutherans chose the latter tract of land, in the hope that the longer distance to the urban St. Louis would insure the religious freedom of their descendants (Douglas 1912). Given that rural isolation, there was little incentive for non-members of the Saxon Lutheran community to move to Eastern Perry County, other than because of marriage to a member of the community. In addition, when parcels of land in the vicinity of the Perry County Lutheran settlements became available for purchase, the Saxon Lutherans were often able to buy the land and further extend the homogeneity of their linguistic isolation. Gerlach noted that there were no non-German landholders in the fifty square mile core area of the Saxon Lutheran settlement (1976).

The effect of the anti-German hysteria during the First World War on the Eastern Perry County Saxons appears to be negligible. While many switched to English in neighboring counties, monolingual German continued to be the rule in farm and family life. The same was true for the period of the Second World War. Those living in Eastern Perry County continued to speak their variety of German. German was also continued in worship services in the village Lutheran churches until the 1960s when it became difficult to find pastors fluent in German. Essentially, life in the Saxon Lutheran farming villages such as Altenburg or Frohna was almost totally in German through the 1940s (Grindstaff 1978).

2.2 North German Lutherans in Concordia, Lafayette County, Missouri



The establishment of a German enclave in Freedom Township of Lafayette County in western Missouri began with the arrival of Heinrich Dierking in the late 1830s. His correspondence with relatives and friends in the area northwest of Hannover in Germany triggered an example of chain migration during the 1840s and beyond. At first these German-speaking farm families purchased land directly from the U.S. government for \$1.25 per acre. They soon expanded their landholdings by buying land from their English-speaking neighbors, creating a largely German-speaking enclave in and around the town site of Concordia.

By 1840, a primitive German Lutheran congregation was beginning to take shape in Freedom Township. By 1844 a first log church was built and by 1847 the congregation was being served by its own ordained pastor, Adolf G. G. Franke. St. Paul Lutheran Church in Concordia would later affiliate with the German Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and Other States in 1854. With the establishment of St. Paul's College in Concordia in 1883, the German Lutheran community became a pillar in the training of pastors for the Missouri Synod. High German was used in worship services and pastoral training well into the mid-twentieth century. On August 5, 1951, some 333 persons attended the German worship service at St. Paul's Church while 551 attended the English service that day (Keel 2006:150). It was not until the 1960s that the use of German in church services of the Lutherans ceased.

German Methodists also established a church in the countryside west of Concordia in the 1840s. Another German denomination, der Evangelische Kirchenverein des Westens (German Evangelical Church) had organized a congregation in the nearby town of Emma, east of Concordia, by 1850. In 1851 there was also a German Baptist congregation in Concordia which built its first church in 1862. The use of German in these smaller congregations did not continue for as long as in the Lutheran group.

The Germans of Concordia suffered during the Civil War for their lack of support for the pro-Confederacy population of this part of Missouri and their opposition to slavery. Lafayette County was actually the county in Missouri with the largest slave population in 1860. With some 6,734 slaves or 31% of the total population in that county, it was thus understandable that there was considerable tension between the opposing factions in the population. A number of the Germans also served in pro-Union Home Guard units further exacerbating the antagonism from the pro-slavery group. The Germans of Freedom Township experienced discrimination and even violent attacks, primarily by so-called bushwhackers or irregular troops, resulting in the murder of men and the rape of women. The worst incident was the death of 24 young German members of a Home Guard unit in a fight with irregulars near Emma in 1864.

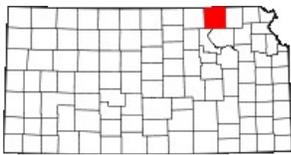
Robert Frizzell believes that these negative experiences of the Civil War led the German community of Concordia to turn inward and avoid interaction with the English-speaking

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

community in the decades after the conflict. Frizzell links the continued use of both the Low German dialect and High German in the community to a defensive mechanism in the community that lasted well into the twentieth century. He states that in “the 1920s, children who were fourth or even fifth generation Missourians could speak only the Hanover dialect of German when they were old enough to begin school” (1977:394). Combined with its close connection with the Missouri Synod, which had a reputation for defending its German heritage, the social isolation of Concordia following the Civil War enabled it to maintain its use of Low German until the end of the twentieth century.

In 1990, in conjunction with the 150th anniversary of its settlement, some of the remaining Low German speakers in Concordia formed a heritage club “Plattdeutsche Hadn Tohopa” (Low German Hearts in Harmony) to foster the speaking of Low German. Community members developed materials to teach Low German to those less fluent in the Low German variety. The group also started a “Low German Theatre” — which performed humorous skits in two performances on a weekend each fall, one of which was accompanied by a “German-style” dinner with sausage and sauerkraut. The last theatre weekend was in 2003 and the heritage club has now also ceased to exist as most members have passed away.

2.3 Horseshoe Creek Lutherans in Marshall and Washington counties, Kansas



The settlement of Marshall and Washington counties in northeastern Kansas began with the adoption of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. With their proximity to the Oregon Trail, both counties were settled relatively early and organized as counties in 1855 and 1860, respectively. By 1880 both counties had grown in population to between 15,000 and 16,000 each with agricultural settlements throughout the territory. German-speaking settlers made up a large portion of the population in both counties, and these Germans came largely from northern Germany. Nearly 20% of Washington County was German-speaking in 1895 (Kansas State Census) and around 15% of Marshall County.

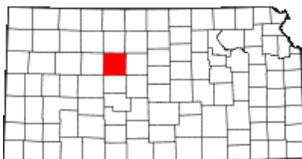
The immigration from northern Germany was in large part due to the efforts of Gerd Heinrich Hollenberg who arrived in Marshall County in 1854, settled along the Oregon Trail there and four years later had established his “Cottonwood Ranch” where the trail crossed a stream in eastern Washington County. Hollenberg later planned the towns of Hanover and Hollenberg in Washington County and was instrumental in getting fellow countrymen from the Kingdom of Hannover in Germany to settle in this part of Kansas. The county border between Hanover in Washington County and Bremen in Marshall County became essentially a Low German speech enclave by the end of the nineteenth century, with a number of Lutheran churches emerging as daughter congregations of Immanuel Lutheran Church just outside of Bremen. In the towns of Hanover (Washington) and Marysville (Marshall County), German Catholics established churches as well.

The parochial schools associated with the rural Lutheran churches were taught primarily in

German well into the mid-twentieth century, ensuring continued training in Standard German and fostering an atmosphere in which speaking Low German in the schoolyard was not a stigma. Those who attended the English-language schools in the cities such as Marysville experienced pressure to assimilate to the dominant language there. Following World War I all instruction in the schools, public and private, was to be in English. These isolated rural settlements retained their German character until the advent of the automobile and the development of paved roads in the years between the world wars.

A bit of a renaissance of the Low German variety in these two counties occurred in the early part of the twenty-first century when Scott Seeger (University of Kansas) conducted research for his dissertation on the patterns of assimilation to English in this speech community. Older members of the community, who were still relatively fluent in Low German, established a Low German Heritage Society in 2005 and also held Low German language classes on a monthly basis. In 2007, the group attracted the attention of North German TV that devoted one of its episodes of *De Welt op Platt* to the speech community in Washington and Marshall counties (“Kansas op Platt – Die Nachfahren der Cowboys,” originally broadcast on June 3, 2007). In 2009, the group also hosted a conference on Low German in the Midwest attended by some 200 members of Low German heritage societies in the Midwest. Since that time, the group has continued to organize social events for their membership.

2.4 Volga-German Catholics in Schoenchen, Ellis County, Kansas



Schoenchen, in southern Ellis County, Kansas, was at its founding in 1877, the last of the initial settlements established by Volga German Catholics on land purchased from the Kansas Pacific Railroad. Conditions in the German colonies along the southern Volga River in the Russian Empire began to encourage emigration in the 1870s. The original colonies had grown in population since their founding in the 1760s, the privileges for the German colonists in Russia had been rescinded in 1871 and new policies of the Russian government began to impact the lives of the Russian-Germans in negative ways, for instance, compulsory military service in the Russian army was required for males. After sending scouts to Kansas in 1874, a major wave of immigration began which culminated in the founding of six original settlements in west central Kansas in 1876 by these German Catholics from the Volga: Herzog (Victoria), Catherine, Pfeiffer, Obermonjour (Munjor) in Ellis County and Liebenthal in Rush County, the sixth being Schoenchen following a dispute among the settlers of Liebenthal which led to a split in that group. With its parish church of St. Anthony, the town was originally to be called either St. Anthony or San Antonio, but the name of the colony along the Volga from which many of the settlers had come, Schoenchen, finally won out.

There were approximately 200 residents in the original community in Schoenchen. There are no official census figures until 1940 when 259 persons resided there. A decline began as

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

documented by the 1950 census with 170 but with some variation until the low point of 128 in 1990. By 2000 the population had increased to 214 and remains approximately 210 (estimate 2013). The increase in population since 1990 can perhaps be attributed to the closeness to Hays, the county seat, which has become a regional shopping destination and also has a state university.

Carman (1962) estimated that 1945 marks the point where the variety of German spoken in Schoenchen was no longer being used in half of the households in the community. Carman reported that those born prior to the First World War habitually spoke German; those born prior to 1950 could speak either German or English; those born after 1950 generally could only speak English. Johnson (1994) reports that the 1990 census shows some 40% of the population of Schoenchen over 18 years of age spoke a language other than English in the home and 25% of that group did not speak English very well. However, for those residents under 18, only 12% claimed to speak a language other than English in the home and all of them spoke English very well. Thus, by the end of the twentieth century the use of German in Schoenchen was very much in decline and on the verge of extinction. Johnson attributes the loss of the immigrant variety to four factors:

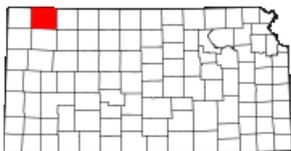
1. Loss of a self-contained community tied together by a local German variety: Schoenchen, which was once an isolated rural community, is now connected to the larger town of Hays in which the use of English is essential. The introduction of the automobile and availability of paved roads certainly accelerated this process.
2. Loss of desire to maintain cultural identity through a German variety: Even though storytelling in German and folksongs sung in German continued to be part of community life at the end of the twentieth century, few could understand the stories or song texts without an English translation. Participation in singing groups has also dwindled.
3. Lack of formal institutions to support use of German variety: Johnson noted very limited use of German reading materials, even in the earliest years of the community, in part because of the lack of formal education in the immigrant generation. Use of German in the Catholic parish did continue until the 1930s, in sermons, prayers and hymns. After 1932 all priests were born in the U.S. and that led to an increased use of English in the church. German and English were used as instructional languages in the parochial school of Schoenchen in the earliest years. After the passage of a state law limiting all instruction in all schools in Kansas to English effectively ended the role of German in education of children in the community.
4. External pressures to assimilate to the American English culture: The primary pressure to acquire English came through the schools. Children who began school as monolingual speakers of a German variety were often teased by other students and had to rapidly learn enough English to survive. Younger siblings were often taught some English at home to avoid this situation. By the 1930s, most parents had made the determination to let their children acquire English prior to beginning school rather

than speak exclusively the German variety spoken in the home. The situation was further exacerbated by the introduction of high schools in two of the Volga German villages in the late 1920s, in Schoenchen and Victoria. This ensured a mix of Volga German and non-Volga German students in the schools and led to a greater use of English, often through peer pressure.

The impact of the two world wars on the use of German in the Volga German communities of Ellis County was also significant. On the one hand public speaking of German was consciously avoided so that one might not be deemed unpatriotic. Another even more important aspect was the military service of many young men. For the first time, many were transported away from their isolated farming communities for military service. At the end of the wars, some did not return to their hometowns and found jobs elsewhere. Others went to college following the wars and in many cases married women from outside of their communities. All of this led to a decline in the use of the German variety and a decrease in the number of speakers. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of persons in Schoenchen who still spoke German was down to a handful of elderly persons.

At the time of the centennial of the Volga-German settlements in west central Kansas in 1976, the villages came together to celebrate their German heritage. Each village produced a centennial book (e.g., *Our Ancestors' Quest for Freedom Realized in Schoenchen, Kansas*, 1979) and also became involved in founding the Sunflower Chapter of the American Historical Association of Germans from Russia in Ellis County in 1979. These activities as well as those of the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Volga-German villages in Ellis and Rush counties in 2001-2002 have highlighted the language and cultural heritage of this community. Despite these attempts to maintain the culture and to some degree the German variety spoken in Schoenchen, the younger generations have simply not acquired the language of their ancestors.

2.5 Herndon Hungarian-Germans in Rawlins County, Kansas



The settlement of the Beaver Creek Valley in northwestern Kansas began relatively late. According to tradition, Matthias Hafner was one of the first to emigrate with his wife and three children from the town of Gols near Sopron in what was then Hungary (now Burgenland in Austria) and claimed a homestead near where the current town of Herndon is located (Carman 1974: II: 494). Their trip had taken them from Austria-Hungary to Nebraska where they had first intended to settle. But finding conditions there unfavorable, they continued by rail as far as McCook and then by wagon up the Beaver Creek into Rawlins County, Kansas. Hafner erected a sign on his claim with the word "Pesth" after the Hungarian capital. The Hafners were soon joined by many more immigrants from the German villages near the Neusiedler Lake in the northwestern part of Hungary. Many followed the route of the Hafners by

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

rail to western Nebraska and then by covered wagon to the Pesth settlement; others came by rail to Buffalo Park in western Kansas and then by wagon to Rawlins County. The Hungarian German settlement extended some twenty miles along Beaver Creek from Traer in Decatur County to the northeast to Atwood in Rawlins County to the southwest with "Pesth" roughly in the middle.

Although the town that developed near the Hafner homestead was renamed Herndon within a few short years, the number of Hungarian Germans in the community grew rapidly. By 1885, the Kansas State Census reported 134 persons born in Hungary out of a total of 225 in the township. Thirty of the remaining 91 were children born of parents from Hungary. By the end of the 1880s, some 400 persons were living in the Herndon community and the town began to thrive in 1887 with the building of a rail line up Beaver Creek from Nebraska by the Burlington Railroad ensuring the easy transport of agricultural products to the outside world (Keel 2012: 192-195).

Until about 1930, the number of residents in the entire area of Rawlins County rose to 7,362. During the 1930s there began a steady decline in the population, in part due to the Great Depression and the effects of the Dust Bowl in this part of the Great Plains. Since 1960, the population of the county has dropped from 5,279 (1960) to 2,512 (2010). In the town of Herndon there were 430 persons in 1930. The population of Herndon has declined since 1980 from 220 (1980) to 129 (2010). In addition, the number of families with children has also become fewer and fewer and as is to be expected in such isolated locales on the High Plains, a large proportion of the current population is over 65 years of age. Apart from isolated farm or ranch houses and small towns, one sees little evidence now of human habitation. Here we are confronted with a general depopulation, especially since the Second World War. Where thousands of people living in large farm families cultivated the land a hundred years ago, there are now only a few hundred. The small farms of 160 acres that sustained a large family with three generations living together have been largely replaced by a few corporate agricultural conglomerates of tens of thousands of acres.

The role of religion in the Hungarian German settlement along Beaver Creek is somewhat complicated. There were both Catholics and Protestants among the German-speaking settlers from Hungary. The Catholics were concentrated west of Herndon and built their first church "Assumption" on land provided by a homesteader about three miles west of Herndon in 1883. By 1915, the present church was built in Herndon of cement blocks. The Catholic cemetery is located about a mile west of the town in the countryside. The Hungarian-German Protestants were not united. They are today represented in Herndon by the Immanuel United Church of Christ and a Protestant cemetery for the Hungarian-Germans just outside of town to the east. From the beginning of the settlement there were disagreements among the Protestants with some tending to affiliate with Lutheran congregations more centered in Decatur County to the east. Eventually, the Lutherans came to associate themselves more and more with the community of Oberlin some twenty miles southeast of Herndon. This trend accelerated transition to English for this sub-group of the Hungarian Germans in northwestern Kansas.

On the eastern outskirts of Herndon a church of the German Evangelical Synod was founded in 1887. The present brick building dates to the late 1920s. In the 1930s, this congregation affiliated with the Evangelical and Reformed Church (a union of the German Reformed and Protestant German synods in the US) and in the late 1950s became a church of the United Church of Christ (with the English-based Congregational Church). In addition to the Evangelicals and Lutherans, there were also three small Protestant communities along Beaver Creek (Traer/1885, Herndon/1885, Ludell/1896) of German Congregationalists.

Based on interviews with community members, the Hungarian Germans in and around Herndon spoke an Eastern Bavarian dialect from the Burgenland region. Today, some 130 years after the arrival of the first settlers from Hungary, one can only hear individual words recalled by the descendants of these settlers. The loss of this dialect and the German language in general in Herndon can in large part be traced to the dramatic decline in population and the social mobility of this community. After an initial surge of immigration from Hungary in the 1880s, the community continued to receive immigrants from the German-speaking area around the Neusiedler Lake until approximately the era of the First World War. The period between the two world wars found Herndon a relatively flourishing community. Those born prior to 1930 grew up in a largely German-speaking environment. But the economic downturn of the 1930s coupled with an increased mobility of the population led to a dramatic reduction of the community which continues into the twenty-first century.

Over time, there were fewer and fewer people, who had acquired the Hungarian-German dialect and those who had learned the immigrant language had fewer opportunities to speak it. Carman provides details about the language of worship in Herndon. At the Catholic masses, sermons were still held in German until the First World War. In the Protestant churches, worship was still conducted in German until the mid- 1920s, in the more rural Lutheran congregations along Beaver Creek until the mid-1940s. Carman also found German inscriptions on grave markers among the Catholics until the early 1930s, among the Protestants until about 1940; the Lutherans until 1944. Confessions among Catholics were still being heard in German until the 1950s and German hymn singing continued in Protestant churches in to the 1950s. The death of Karl Wendelin in December 2010 at the age of 96 years marked the end of the community's Hungarian-German dialect.

3 Assimilation to American English by Speakers of German Varieties in Missouri and Kansas

In considering the process of assimilation to the dominant American English society in the five communities discussed, we can view that process in terms of generational change over the course of the twentieth century. Within the core family unit, changes began as soon as contact with the dominant society occurred, usually through adult males who must interact with the larger

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

society: traveling to a town, shopping at a store, selling agricultural products at market and the like. Women and children are more likely to remain in the immigrant culture and by the same token the linguistic variety in the home and in the church. A significant aspect of this process is the language of the school to which the children are sent. In the communities under discussion, this was typically a Lutheran or Catholic parochial school where at least some of the subjects, especially those related to religious life were taught in German.

As Seeger emphasized in his 2007 dissertation, each member of the speech community was embedded in a network of interlocutors with whom that person would typically converse or interact in a specific variety: either the dialect variety of the community, the high variety (literary German) or American English. For example, a child would often speak the dialect variety of German with grandparents and would have to use a form of literary German with the school teacher or pastor. With siblings that same child might use English because of the shared school experience. Interestingly, nearly all speech community members also used the dialect variety of German with farm animals in the early years of the settlement. It cannot be emphasized enough that these communication networks for each member of the community could be rather complicated. Outside pressures acted to mold and manipulate these models of interaction over several generations to accomplish the final assimilation to the dominant culture and language.

Although the following model of assimilation is perhaps an oversimplification, it serves to outline the process quite well and is, in general, applicable to the five communities we have observed. The original version of this assimilation model was produced by Mary D. Schmidt in her master's thesis of 1977 (58-60). Her study involved the duration of use for the varieties of German spoken by German Mennonites who had immigrated from the Russian Empire to Kansas in the 1870s and established extensive settlements in south central Kansas. I have slightly modified the time parameters of Schmidt's original model to reflect a more general application in our region of the Great Plains:

1. Persons born prior to 1915:
These individuals were raised in a nearly exclusive German environment. A German dialect was used at home while literary German was learned in school and used in church. By the last third of the twentieth century this group still enjoyed speaking the German dialect at gatherings of family and close friends.
2. Persons born 1915-30:
These individuals grew up with a mostly German home life with occasional use of English. They were still exposed to some formal training in literary German and German was still used for some religious purposes until they reached adulthood. A critical difference in this group is that they began using English when speaking to their children.

3. Persons born 1930-45:
These individuals grew up with some German in the home, but English had begun to predominate. They typically had no formal training in literary German and can only recall German being used in church as children. They may often have a good passive knowledge of a German dialect, but can typically speak only short phrases and individual words.
4. Persons born 1945-60:
These individuals typically did not hear German spoken in the home and lack the passive understanding of the preceding groups. This group has usually had no experience with literary German either in school or in church.
5. Persons born after 1960:
These individuals have had virtually no experience with German or a German dialect and yet have a keen awareness of their community's German linguistic and cultural heritage.

4 Factors Leading to the Switch to English

The anti-German feelings during the World War I era certainly suppressed public use of German and may have accelerated the already growing trend to use English in place of German. But usage of German dialects in the home was less susceptible to such external pressures. Certainly, the major factor in the shift away from German was the introduction of English as the instructional language in schools. In Kansas, English was mandated in most schools already by the 1890s. Thus the generation that reached maturity by 1920 typically had had difficulty in school because of the use of English and parents determined that their children would not have to deal with that problem. Thus, we find the scenario over and over again of parents using the immigrant variety with each other, but switching to English to speak with their children. Children in turn found it easier to use English with the other children at school and with their older siblings who were further along the path to assimilation.

As more and more young people became more comfortable using English instead of the immigrant variety, churches also tended to switch to English usage when they determined that the younger members no longer understood enough German. Some congregations, especially Protestant ones, became interested in evangelization of English-speaking non-members which further led to a greater use of English in the churches. Most of these German churches switched to the use of English in the period between 1920 and 1940.

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

Another major factor was the automobile, leading to increasing mobility and the breakup of the rural population and the move to the larger cities which led to much greater reliance on English. This began during years surrounding World War I and accelerated rapidly after World War II. The introduction of Ford's Model-T in 1908 and continued production until 1927 marked the end of rural isolation for many of these farming communities. This was augmented by the initiative to establish United States highways in rural areas (e.g., the Federal Highway Act of 1921) and the eventual improvement and paving of these roads during the mid-twentieth century. The automobile and paved highways facilitated the mobility of the rural population and created an environment in which linguistic enclaves could not maintain their isolation (the example of the Amish proves this point). This mobility in addition to the transfer of population from rural counties to cities since the middle of the twentieth century has led to many former vibrant rural communities now being virtual ghost towns.

The five communities discussed here reacted to these factors somewhat differently. Three communities, the Saxon Lutherans in Perry County in Missouri, the Hanoverian Lutherans in Marshall and Washington counties in Kansas, and the Hungarian-Germans of Herndon, Kansas, are all in relative isolation to this day. The loss of population has been especially telling on the Hungarian-Germans where the last speaker of the Bavarian variety had passed away. In essence, this linguistic enclave has ceased to exist. The same situation obtains in the other two communities, although there is still a remnant of the last generation of speakers of the immigrant variety. This can be attributed — although this is speculation — to the strong influence of the church in these communities and the adherence of the church to the use of German for religious purposes until well into the mid-twentieth century.

Two of the communities — the Concordia, Missouri Hanoverian Lutherans and the Schoenchen Volga-German Catholics, have, on the other hand, been situated along major transportation corridors and have developed close connections to either a major urban area (Kansas City, Missouri) or a regional city (Hays, Kansas). While these connections have ensured the overall viability of these communities they have also led to the dilution of the German context of these communities through the introduction of a non-German speaking populace. With time the older members of these communities and their linguistic variety will pass from the scene.

5 Conclusion

By comparing the transition of five distinct speech communities of transplanted German varieties in Missouri and Kansas to American English, we can draw some very general conclusions about such assimilatory transitions. Certainly, the actual number of speakers in a speech community is of great importance in terms of the sustainability of that variety in a linguistic enclave, surrounded by speakers of American English and other non-English varieties. To the degree that the population speaking the immigrant variety maintained itself or even increases through birth or

continued in-migration, the likelihood of the maintenance of the variety was enhanced. Those linguistic enclaves which were served by churches and schools using a “high” variety of the immigrant language supported the continuance of the “low” variety in the speech community.

Factors which contributed to the assimilation of the German variety to American English appear to be largely social change affecting the entire society, including out-migration, enhanced mobility with the introduction of automobiles and improved roadways. Obviously, as the speech community lost population and was able to interact with the larger society through increased mobility, the underpinning of the immigrant variety was jeopardized.

Of great significance was the language of instruction in schools for the younger generations. For many of these communities, public schools with instruction in English led to more and more of the younger members using English among themselves. Additionally, those who had experience difficulties in attending an English school due to their speaking a non-English variety in the home, typically made a conscious decision to teach their own children English to avoid that situation in the future. This in turn impacted the language used for worship services in the churches. Church elders faced with younger members who no longer felt comfortable in German worship services began introducing English prior to the First World War. By the middle of the 20th century, this transition to English in the churches was largely accomplished.

Even a relatively isolated and intact speech community such as that of the Saxon Lutherans in Perry County, Missouri, ultimately will succumb to the social impact of sending their children to schools with instruction in English. The generation born after the Second World War has been largely schooled in English and has only fragmentary knowledge of their parents’ German variety. The contrast is very marked. An individual born prior to 1940 may be essentially fluent in the immigrant variety — commenting that on travel to Germany they were able to speak with Germans (in Saxony) in the same dialect. The grown children of these persons, however, have a very limited knowledge of and in essence no competence in the language of their elders, even if they have taken German as a foreign language in school.

Modelling the Dynamics of Intergenerational Assimilation

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