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Phonetic Change in German Dialects on the Great Plains¹

One of the most intriguing and significant aspects of the study of ethnic speech enclaves is the fact that these language islands enable us to observe various kinds of linguistic change at first hand. We can, for example, trace the process of lateral accommodation and compromise that occurs when individuals or communities with incompatible dialects need to communicate. We can also study the vertical influence of the standard language (in both its formal written and informal spoken forms) on the dialects of the enclaves. We can consider a wide variety of problems, including code switching and interference, associated with bidialectalism and bilingualism. Most of the linguistic changes directly observable in speech islands have parallels in the homeland that are recorded in histories and reflected in dialect geographies of the language. A major difference between linguistic change in the home country and in transplanted dialects is the length of time involved. Changes that seemingly required centuries in the place of origin can occur within a generation or two in speech enclaves. Thus it seems obvious that the spacial distribution of linguistic phenomena in the home country can be related to changes on the diachronic plane in language islands and vice versa.²

Remnants of the many German dialects once spoken on the Great Plains still provide opportunities for the application of dialect geography to linguistic history. Especially intriguing are the twice- or repeatedly transplanted German dialects that came to the Great Plains by way of the Volga, the Black Sea region, and other areas of eastern Europe. In those cases where the German homelands of such Great Plains dialects are known, it is possible to trace linguistic change over a period of two centuries. One of the few German colonies on the Volga for which we have information regarding the provenience of the settlers is Balzer. It was partly for this reason that we chose the Balzer dialect as spoken in Lincoln, Nebraska as one of the first German dialects to be studied.³

The colony of Balzer was located about eight miles west of the Volga and about sixty miles south of the provincial capital Saratov. Established in 1765, Balzer had a population of 11,556 in 1926. The official name was Golyj Karamysch. Its German designation, like those of most German colonies on the

Volga, derived from the name of the first mayor, Balzer Barthuly, whose place of origin is variously given as Essen and Hesse. The latter is evidently correct since the main street, on which he and his descendants lived, was named Hessen Straße.⁴ According to an *Immigrantenliste* for the years 1765-67 eleven of the colonists were "aus: Düdelsheim/Isenburgischen [sic]," forty-six "aus: Isenburgischen [sic]," twenty from the Palatinate, and the remaining sixteen from elsewhere.⁵ Another source includes colonists for the year 1768, bringing to 246 the number of immigrants "from Isenburg, Hessen [sic]," which was incorrectly identified with Neu-Isenburg near Frankfurt/Main.⁶

There are cogent reasons for assuming that the geographical area referred to was the territory of the Count of Isenburg/Büdingen and that most of the Balzer colonists came from the city and the environs of Büdingen. A glance at the map of Hesse prepared by Karl Stumpp reveals that whereas there was little emigration from the Frankfurt area, Hessians were lured to Russia from dozens of communities north, west, and south of Büdingen.⁷ The reason for this is obvious. The Russian emigration agent Facius, who was expelled from Frankfurt in 1766, was warmly welcomed in Büdingen, where "the Russian commissioner enrolled and shipped away thousands of subjects" from the surrounding areas.⁸ Further confirmation is provided by a "Verzeichnis der Aus- und Einwanderer" from Hesse to the Volga that lists over one hundred emigrants from the city and over two hundred from the district of Büdingen as well as dozens who were married in the *Kreisstadt* prior to emigration.⁹

Since about three fourths of the Balzer colonists came from this locality, we should expect our Lincoln "Balzerer," as they choose to identify themselves, to speak some form of Central Hessian and thus to say [aɪç saɪn] for *ich bin*, [kɛnt] for *Kind*, and [lɔit] and [mɔit] for *Leute* and *müde* (<MHG *iu* and *üe*). Further primary features of Central Hessian are the raised midvowels, as in [ʃni:] *Schnee* and [ru:t] *rot* (<MHG *ē/ō*) and the "tumbled diphthongs," as in [leip] *lieb* and [brɔudɐ] *Bruder* (<MHG *ie/uo*).¹⁰ We have recorded all of these forms at various times and places on the Great Plains, but only a few of them from the lips of our Balzer speakers.

These informants, who had attended schools in Balzer in which the languages of instruction were German and Russian, immigrated to Nebraska as adults after World War I. The earliest interviews (1955-56) were conducted in Standard German, but the stimulus words and phrases were presented in English in the hope of minimizing Standard-German influence. This stratagem was not overly successful, partly because the English terms frequently had to be explained and partly because our Balzerer, like most Volga-German speakers, felt ill at ease in responding in dialect to interrogators speaking Standard German. Subsequent interviews, in which only dialect was spoken, elicited more Balzer-German and fewer Standard-German responses. Several other factors may well have been involved in the fact that our latest efforts (1978-83) were more successful. Because of the discontinuance of German church services, the disappearance of German newspapers, and the decline in correspondence with German relatives abroad, our Lincoln Balzerer would naturally revert more and more to dialect.

As indicated above, Balzer German as spoken in Lincoln, Nebraska, has retained few of the primary features of Central Hessian. Our speakers all said [hɛŋgəl] for [hɪŋgəl] *Huhn*, but this is the only Balzer word we recorded in

which a short high front Middle High German front vowel (*i*, *ü*) is reflected by [ɛ]. The fact that the English loanword *store* is pronounced [ʃdu:ɐ] suggests that the raised Middle High German *ō* had not completely disappeared at the time of immigration. Furthermore Georg Dinges reported [ʃdoiljə] *Fußbank* (*Stühlchen*) from the colony for the year 1931. For the previous year he reported [betlɔ:rə] *Bettstelle*. In a "Schwank" or anecdote recorded by Dinges in Balzer about ten years earlier we find such Central Hessian forms as *Kend* for *Kind*, *frou* for *fragt*, *aich* for *ich*, *su* for *so*, and *wei* for *wie*.¹¹ My most recent Balzer informant, however, who left Russia at the age of ten, cannot recall ever hearing any words pronounced in that manner. The discrepancy is more apparent than real. "Schwänke" are usually related by elderly people in what my Indian informants call the "deep, old" language. And, as we shall see, there was no reason for all the Balzer colonists to abandon their ancestral tongue completely. As Dinges has shown, two dialects could and did persist in a given colony, especially in a large one like Balzer.¹²

Except for the fact that Balzer German lacks rounded front vowels, the vocalism of this dialect closely resembles that of Standard German. The five *ē/e* phones of Middle High German have coalesced into the two phonemes /e:/ and /ɛ/, which are realized as [e:] and [ɛ]. (Schwa will be assigned to the /e/ phoneme.) The long vowels /i: o: u:/ are also higher and more tense than the short series /i o u/. /a:/ and /a/ are realized as [ɑ:] and [ɑ]. The diphthongs are /ai/ and /au/. /oi/ occurs in only a few words, which can be regarded as Standard German loans. The almost complete absence of /oi/ seems all the more remarkable when we recall that /oi/ was the reflex of Middle High German *üe* as well as *iu* in the original Central Hessian dialects of Balzer.

The vocalism of Balzer German can be exemplified by the following words: /fri:/ *früh*, /ʃdig/ *Stück*, /se:e/ *sehen*, /rexd/ *recht*, /sa:xe/ *sagen*, /fale/ *fallen*, /kob/ *Kopf*, /ro:d/ *rot*, /pund/ *Pfund*, /bru:der/ *Bruder*, /laid/ *Leute*, and /haus/ *Haus*. Doublets in our Balzer recordings are quite numerous. Typical examples are /ned/—/nix/ *nicht*, /ko:der/—/ka:der/ *Kater*, /ʃo:f/—/ʃa:f/ *Schaf*, /ha:m/—/haim/ *heim*, /a:xe/—/auxen/ *Augen*, /pund/—/fund/ *Pfund*, /vaiver/—/vaiber/ *Weiber*, /duvag/—/tabag/ *Taback*, /kume/—/komen/ *kommen* and /gekend/—/gekand/ *gekannt*. The first word of each doublet is a dialect form; the second approximates Standard German. During interviews informants frequently made such comments as "we say [ʃo:f], but [ʃa:f] is 'better' German." Such doublets and words that have no Standard German cognates enable us to reconstruct an earlier form of Balzer German that we might label the "replacement" language for the original Central Hessian dialects. The form /fund/ for *Pfund* is perhaps best explained as one of the East Middle German loans such as are found sporadically in Hessian dialects, where West Germanic *p-* has otherwise remained unshifted.

The reasons for the (partial) replacement of Central Hessian in Balzer are obvious. Because of the scarcity of agricultural land Balzer soon became an industrial and trading colony—indeed, the leading German commercial center on the west bank of the Volga in the entire Saratov district. Mills, factories, and foundries flourished. A specialty of Balzer was *sarpinka* (a kind of gingham made from dyed fibers), enormous quantities of which were produced in this colony. This industry, in turn, financed the founding of mills to transform the chief agricultural product of the colonies, wheat, into flour, a major source of

export and income.¹³ In order to communicate with buyers and sellers from many colonies, Balzer manufacturers had to learn to employ a form of language that was mutually acceptable and understandable. Farmers, craftsmen, and others who had little contact with the outside world could, of course, continue to speak their ancestral tongue. The transition from Central Hessian to the Volga *Umgangssprache*, a form of Rhenish Franconian, was quite simple: speakers avoided the primary Central Hessian features—phonetic and lexical—by substituting individual words from Rhenish Franconian. At first blush this may seem like speculation, but a similar, albeit less comprehensive, development occurred in the Hessian dialects from the villages of Kraft, Herzog, and Frank in the Volga settlement area (recorded in Kansas in 1982). In the Kraft dialect, for example, the raised midvowels occur sporadically, as in [vi:ə] for *weh*; but [ksi:] *gesehen*, which has been retained in the dialects of Herzog and Frank, has been replaced in the Kraft dialect by [kse:ə]. In none of these dialects, however, did I find relics of tumbled diphthongs or [ɔi] as a reflex of Middle High German *üe*.¹⁴ Furthermore Dinges and Schirmunski reported on several other villages along the Volga in which Hessian and Swabian dialects underwent radical vocalic changes through the influence of Rhenish Franconian and Standard German.¹⁵ The consonants and the remaining vowels and diphthongs of the original dialects were so similar to those of Rhenish Franconian that they caused no difficulty in communication. As the pressure of Standard German grew—through the influence of the village schools, the churches, and (since 1874) the newspapers—Central Hessian/Rhenish Franconian bidialectalism yielded to Rhenish Franconian/Standard German bidialectalism. The dialect spoken by our Lincoln Balzerer is essentially Rhenish Franconian with Standard German interference that varies somewhat from one individual to another and from one occasion to another.

By contrast, in relatively isolated farming villages the Central Hessian dialects of the colonists could be preserved. Our Norka speakers in Nebraska, for example, have retained the primary features of Central Hessian to this very day. They are especially teased by speakers of other dialects for their pronunciation of [kɔi] *Kühe*, [fɔis] *Füsse*, [frɔi] *früh*, [grɔi] *grün*, [sois] *süß*, etc.¹⁶

About two years after the completion of our initial study of Balzer German an analysis of the phonology and morphology of Amana German appeared in print.¹⁷ This dialect is spoken in seven villages that comprise the Amana Community of the True Inspiration, located eighteen miles southwest of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Amana Community was founded in 1853 by Germans who emigrated in 1843. The ancestors of the Amana-German speakers came from a region of central Hesse bordered by Büdingen, Gelnhausen, and Hanau. Their ancestral dialects must therefore have been very similar to those of the Balzerer. Amana German has retained fewer phonetic features of Central Hessian and fewer Hessian lexical items than Balzer German. The phonology, especially the vocalism, of the two dialects is almost identical, as a comparison of the following forms with those given for Balzer German will show: /li:b/, /ʃdig/, /se:en/, /rexd/, /sa:xen/, /falen/, /kopf/, /ro:d/, /pfund/, /bru:dr/, /nai/, /laid/, and /auxen/. According to Reed and Wiese, /oi/ is marginal, occurring only in a few words such as /boime/ *Bäume* that are occasionally used instead of /baime/. I follow Reed and Wiese in writing /pf/, although this phoneme is realized as [ph].

On the mistaken assumption that I could elicit more "genuine" Amana-German dialect forms than Reed and Wiese had done, I attempted to conduct interviews in several of the Amana villages in a form of Rhenish Franconian acquired during several years of studying Rhenish-Franconian dialects. The attempt was not productive. My informants had difficulty understanding my dialect and responded with their "best" Standard German. Instead of saying [dʊəft], [bʊəfdə], and [drebə] for *Durst*, *Bürste*, and *Treppe* they said [dʊəst], [bʊəsdə] and [trəbə]. Like the Balzerer, most speakers of Amana German have two "levels" of language. One is used for casual conversation among themselves, the other for singing, reading aloud, and for speaking to tourists or intruders like myself. The former sounds like *Rhein Hessisch* or Rhenish Franconian, the latter like an old-fashioned form of Standard German with occasional Hessian words or phrases.

How could the Central Hessian dialects spoken by the ancestors of the Amana people be so radically transformed in such a short period of time? Reed and Wiese emphasize the influence of written Standard German and consider the possibility of premigration lateral influence from Swabian for the articulation of /ai/ as [vi]. Kurt Rein distinguishes between /ai/ and /oi/ and considers the latter to be a relic from Central Hessian (and thus a reflex of Middle High German *iu*). He also posits influence from an "earlier variant of a super-regional Hessian *Umgangssprache*" as well as from written Standard German.¹⁸ This *Umgangssprache* was similar to, but not identical with, the city dialect of Frankfurt/Main. Thus the phonological changes in the Balzer- and Amana-German dialects would have been caused by similar vertical forces, but these forces would have been operative in Russia following the first migration in the case of Balzer German and in Germany before emigration in the case of Amana German. Furthermore, lateral influence from neighboring villages must have been significant in the transformation of Balzer German, although less decisive than the vertical influence of Rhenish Franconian and Standard German.

Another Great Plains dialect for which we know the homeland is the so-called "Swiss Mennonite" or "Schweizerisch," spoken in Moundridge, Kansas, and Freeman, South Dakota.¹⁹ The misnomer "Schweizerisch" stems from the fact that the ancestors of these Mennonites originally came from the canton of Bern, Switzerland. Their home was in the northern Palatinate, however, from 1670 until 1797, when they proceeded by stages to Volhynia. During their stay in Germany their High Alemannic Bernese was replaced—virtually completely, as it seems—by a Palatine dialect. The immigration to the United States occurred in 1874. The only obvious Alemannic feature in Volhynian Mennonite German today is the diminutive ending /li/, which it shares, however, with many other Palatine dialects in Germany and on the Great Plains.

The vocalism of Volhynian Mennonite German is very similar to that of Balzer German and Amana German. The two *e* phonemes are /e:/ and /e/, realized as [e:] and [e]. Vowel length is phonemic, and long vowels are somewhat higher and more tense than the corresponding short ones. The lowering of short vowels before *r* plus consonant is not as marked as in most Palatine dialects on the Great Plains. The phoneme variant [æ:] occurs only before *r* in words like [hæ:r] *her* and [væ:r] *wer*. Instead of being reduced to [ə], short vowels retain their phonetic value in pretonic position, so that *gelesen* is pronounced [ge'le:s]. The formation of the past participle with loss of final *-en* is

a characteristic feature of Palatine dialects in the areas in which these Mennonites lived in Germany.

In the consonant system, however, Volhynian Mennonite German deviates considerably from Balzer German and Amana German and from the Palatine dialects their ancestors spoke two centuries ago. In the first place, /r/ is pronounced as a weak apical alveolar trill in all positions and is seldom vocalized or assimilated as in Palatine dialects generally. (This articulation of /r/ is not uncommon, however, among Hessian dialects on the Great Plains.) In voiced surroundings the stops *b*, *d*, *g* become slightly voiced and in intervocalic position are spirantized, so that Kurt Rein could designate them as *lenes aspiratae*.²⁰ Thus *Abend* is pronounced [o:bhət] or [o:bβət] instead of [o:βət], as generally in Palatine dialects. There is no evidence of *d*-rhotacism. Either this sound shift occurred in the German homeland after emigration from the Palatinate, as I once attempted to demonstrate, or the stop has subsequently been restored, as Rein is inclined to assume.²¹ In the treatment of -*g*- Volhynian Mennonite German also deviates markedly from Palatine dialects generally. Whereas -*g*- (as [gh] or [gʏ]) is retained in Volhynian Mennonite German regardless of the preceding vowel, it appears as a spirant or completely disappears in Palatine dialects, where we find such forms as [li:jə], [li:çə], and [li:ə] for *liegen* and [a:ʏə], [a:xə], and [a:ə] for *Augen*.

Although the vowel system of Volhynian Mennonite German is similar to those of Balzer German and Amana German, there are a few individual sounds that are intriguing. In Volhynian Mennonite German the first person singular of *haben* is /hab/ and the common plural is /hen/. We should expect /hun/ in both cases. In northern Palatine dialects Middle High German *ei* is reflected by /a:/. The Moundridge variant of Volhynian Mennonite German has /e:/, and the Freeman variant has /ai/ as in Standard German. The Palatine reflex of Middle High German *ou* is a long vowel, realized variously as [a:], [æ:], and [ɑ:]. In Volhynian Mennonite German as in Standard German it appears as /au/.

How are these consonantal and vocalic deviations to be explained? The pronunciation of /r/ as a trill in all positions and the retention of full vowels in pretonic position appear to be "reading" pronunciations, i.e., attempts to speak "mehr der Schrift nach." /e:/ as a reflex of Middle High German *ei* and the deviant *haben* forms could represent vertical influence from an early Palatine *Umgangssprache*. /ai/ as a reflex of Middle High German *ei* could be a survival of Alsatian—one contingent of emigrants to Volhynia came via Alsace and Montbéliard—fortified by Standard German. The treatment of -*b*- and -*g*- could also represent an effort on the part of the speakers of Volhynian Mennonite German to imitate Standard German. In eastern Europe they were variously in contact with Hutterites, who spoke Upper German, and with West Prussian Mennonites, who spoke Low German. With both of these groups communication was possible only in Standard German. Furthermore, there were German villages in Galicia and Volhynia in which only Standard German was spoken. Even today there is a certain amount of Standard German interference in the speech of many of these Mennonites despite the fact that German schools and German church services were discontinued at the time of World War I.

Since our first Balzerer spoke little English, there was little trace of English influence in their speech. The English loanwords were well incorporated into their Balzer-German sound system. In Amana German and Volhynian Men-

nonite German, however, English influence is quite noticeable, especially in the articulation of the /l/. In both dialects the alveolar [l] has either been replaced by the American retroflex [ɭ] or else, if retained, is accompanied by a simultaneous raising of the back of the tongue. In either case the auditory impression is similar: the /l/ sounds "dark" as opposed to the "light" alveolar /l/ pronounced with the tongue not raised toward the velum.

Whereas the substitution of the American lateral for the German one is quite general, the substitution of the American retroflex [ɭ] for the German apico-alveolar trill [r] is only sporadic. It occurs more often in final position than initially, and more generally among young speakers than among older ones. This intrusion of the American *r* is not unusual in German dialects spoken in this country by bilinguals. It is not uncommon on the Great Plains to hear English spoken with a German accent (usually unvoicing of voiced consonants, especially in final position) and German spoken with an English accent (principally substitution of [ɧ] and [ɧ̥] for [l] and [r]). In addition to these two kinds of sound substitution, we occasionally find plurals formed by the addition of *-s* by analogy to English. On the other hand many individuals speak their native German dialect and English, which they acquired in school, with little or no trace of phonetic interference from their other language. Surprisingly enough, some of these bilinguals pronounce what little Standard German they know—prayers, songs, Bible verses, sentences from the catechism—with excruciatingly perfect English sound substitution. We shall return to this question presently.

In marked contrast to Amana German and Volhynian Mennonite German, in which English phonetic influence was largely confined to the replacement of two German phones by their English equivalents, several Low German dialects have undergone major modification of their vowel systems under the influence of English. The dialects Eastphalian and East Frisian are spoken in Gage County, south of Lincoln. The informants were second- and third-generation descendants of settlers who emigrated from the region of Hermannsburg in the southern part of the Lüneburger Heide and from two communities in East Frisia, Grossefehn and Moorlage, during the early 1880s. These two Low German dialects were studied by Jan E. Bender, who has spoken both Eastphalian and East Frisian since childhood.²²

The pronunciation of Nebraska Eastphalian is less crisp, more relaxed, than that of the dialect in the homeland. Thus [pɛ:bə] *Pfeffer* is pronounced [pɛ::bə], with marked lengthening of the radical vowel. [bla:s] *blaß* becomes [bla:s], and [zɔlt] *Salz* is sometimes pronounced [zɔ::lt]. In addition to lengthening, short vowels have undergone opening. The locus of articulation has moved backward, possibly under the influence of the American retroflex or velar [ɭ], which has supplanted the German alveolar [l]. Whereas the phonemes /a/ and /a:/ are realized in Germany as [æ] and [a:], they are pronounced [a] and [ɑ:] in Nebraska. Long vowels (or short vowels followed by long continuants) sometimes are diphthongized, so that [vɛ:n] *gewesen* becomes [vɛ:ən], [fel:n] *Feld* becomes [fɛa:n], and [smø:kt] *rauchen* becomes [smøəkt].

Other changes that are characteristic of the Nebraska variant of the Eastphalian dialect are the simplification of consonant clusters and the loss of final consonants, especially those that do not occur in English. Two doublets recorded by one and the same informant will illustrate the first type of sound change: [vɛ:zn]—[vɛ:n] *sein* or *gewesen*, and [naxtʃs]—[naxs] *nachts*. /g/ and

/x/ are frequently dropped in final position: [fələ:ə] *vielleicht*, [gəneo] *genug*, and [neefiri] *neugierig*. Both kinds of consonant loss are illustrated by [tʃini] for [tʃindiç] *zwanzig*.

In the homeland the Eastphalian dialect underwent an equally comprehensive change in its sound system under the influence of Standard German. [ʀ], imported from Standard German, now occurs in free variation with the native [r], as do [β] and [v] when preceded by /t/, /k/, and /ʃ/: [tvi:ç] *Zweig*, [kvap] *Kaulquappe*, and [ʃvesdə] *Schwester*. Formerly only [β] occurred following these three consonants. As we saw above, the /a/ is realized as [æ], which Bender attributes to the influence of Standard German. Whereas vowels in the Nebraska variant of Eastphalian tend to be lengthened, lowered, and sometimes diphthongized, the opposite tendency is noticeable in Germany under the strong influence of Standard German. Unless there is a sudden powerful renaissance of Eastphalian, it will soon disappear, since many parents in the Hermannsburg area no longer teach their children their ancestral dialect.

In East Frisia, on the other hand, Low German is spoken by young and old alike, and Standard German is used only when absolutely necessary. Despite the fact that East Frisians speak Standard German with massive sound substitution from their dialect, however, the speech of younger speakers shows some Standard German influence. Whereas old East Frisian triphthongs have been preserved in Nebraska and by the oldest dialect speakers in Germany, they are pronounced as diphthongs by the youngest generation under the influence of Standard German. By contrast, diphthongization of vowels in the Nebraska variant has occurred under English influence. This divergence can be illustrated by the following words: [ɔ:bm] vs. [ɔ:obm] *Ofen*, [pɛ:pə] vs. [pɛepə] *Pfeffer*, [vo:ət] vs. [vɔoəd] *Wort*, and [ʃβo:ə] vs. [ʃβooə] *schwer*.

Through English influence there has also been a general lengthening of vowels, as illustrated by the following words: [is]—[i:s] *Eis*, [hus]—[hu:s] *Haus*, [fi:f]—[fi::f] *fünf*, and [twɔlf]—[twa:lɔf] *zwölf*. Among younger speakers of East Frisian in Germany the offglide of short vowels tends to disappear under the influence of Standard German, diphthongs become monophthongized, and, as already noted, triphthongs are reduced to diphthongs. Among American speakers as well as older German speakers the diphthongs too have been preserved. Typical examples are [blɔ:dn]—[blɔ:odn] *Blätter*, [bɛ:tə]—[bɛ:etə] *besser*, [lø:f]—[lœøf] (*ich*) *glaube*, and [zœ::m]—[zœ:øm] *sieben*. Through English influence the initial voiced sibilant has been unvoiced.

There are good reasons for believing that the vocalic changes in the Nebraska variant of East Frisian caused by influence from English are primarily third-generation phenomena, just as the vocalic differences in the speech of younger persons in East Frisia represent recent sound substitutions from Standard German. My earliest notes on the East Frisian of Nebraska, which date from 1940, reflect the speech habits of the mid 1920s—that is, the language of East Frisian immigrants and their children. My informant, Dr. Gerjet Memming, came to the United States from East Frisia in 1925 at the age of twenty-one. He worked as a *Knecht* on East Frisian farms in Nebraska for several years before beginning to study English in preparation for college. Although not a dialectologist, Memming held a doctoral degree in Germanic philology and was a specialist in East Frisian folktales, which he collected during summer visits to Germany. Through his fieldwork in the area of the folktale, he was thoroughly

acquainted with geographical and generational differences in the dialect of his native province. During his first two years in Nebraska, Memming heard little or no English spoken among his East Frisian friends and relatives. The only phonetic aberration he noted in the East Frisian of Nebraska was a tendency to "confuse" /d/ and /r/ in medial and final position.

Bender, however, observed numerous consonantal replacements in the speech of his third-generation East Frisian informants. Frequently such substitutions are reciprocal. Whereas /f/ replaces /g/ in [zɛ:ɛf] *Ziege*, /g/ replaces /f/ in [a:ɣ] *Erbse*. Similarly /kŋ/ stands for /tn/ in [haerɔ:kŋ] *heiraten*, but /tn/ for /kŋ/ in [tɔotn jɔə] *nächstes Jahr*. /m/ and /ŋ/ are mutually replaceable as in [vy:əŋ] *Würmer* and [zɛ:dəm] *Zeitung*, and so are the liquids, as in [haɔəl] *Eber* and [i:shɛəkər] *Eiszapfen*—the latter only before initial vowels.

Another reason for assuming that the vowel shifts and the consonantal aberrations in the Nebraska variants of these two Low German dialects are third-generation phenomena is the fact that there are so many doublets, especially in Eastphalian. One and the same individual will use the received form and the form with consonant substitution. Typical examples are [a:fn] beside [a:fn] *Erbsen*, [teegŋ] beside [teedn] *ziehen*, [ɛegŋ] beside [ɛedn] *eins*, and [zu:bm] vs. [zu:ɡŋ] *saugen*, whereby associative interference from [zu:bm] *saufen* seems to have been involved. Similarly the substitution of [brɛ::n] for [brɛ::ŋ] *Gehirn* was apparently influenced by English *brain*.

Whereas the vocalic divergence in these two Low German dialects is due primarily to the vertical influence of Standard German and English respectively, the consonantal aberrations, according to Bender, are the result of not hearing correctly and of not having incorrect pronunciations corrected. To this explanation might be added the observation that cohesive East Frisian and Eastphalian speech communities no longer exist. The dialects are spoken by scattered individuals and families, whose neighbors speak only English or perhaps English and a Low German dialect quite different from their own. Even during the time when this area of Gage County was popularly known as "Little Germany," Eastphalian and East Frisian speakers were surrounded and outnumbered by Germans who spoke different dialects of Low German. The greatest number spoke *Niedersächsisch* 'Low Saxon.' The dissolution of the speech communities is reflected by the disintegration of the languages under the crushing weight of English. Lateral influence on East Frisian and Eastphalian, both here and abroad, is demonstrable, but since it was not a major force in the sound changes discussed above, it need not be considered in detail here.

Consonantal changes similar to those which Bender mentioned have been observed elsewhere. In various Low German, and especially in Palatine and Hessian, dialects the "confusion of *d* and *r*" has consistently changed medial and final alveolar stops to apico-alveolar trills or taps. This kind of consistent change seems to be *sprachimmanent*, the result of certain habitual articulatory tendencies.²³ As already noted, the sporadic occurrence of *d*-rhotacism in German dialects from Russia raises the question of the date of this consonant shift.

Several cases of consonantal aberration have been observed in the Hutterite dialect.²⁴ Among the most interesting is the treatment of *Kuvert*, which appears variously as [ka'vert], [ka'verk], and, with exchange of velar and alveolar stops, as [ta'verk]. This type of sound confusion fits Bender's category of *Hörver-*

fehlungen, which we might interpret as a combination of defective hearing and defective reproduction. It is interesting in this connection to recall Sturtevant's comment that he pronounced "trough as *trouth* until age thirty" and that he became aware of his faulty pronunciation "only by seeing a printed list of words with *gh* for the sound of *f*."²⁵

Rein notes some interesting doublets in Hutterite that he assigns to two different subdialects. Thus in Standard Hutterite *Geschirr*, *Geschichte*, *geschickt*, *gesund*, and *Gesicht* have the expected forms [kʃi:r], [kʃiçt], [kʃikxt], [ksunt], and [ksiçt]. In Basic Hutterite, however, the initial stop is assimilated to the sibilant, resulting in such forms as [tʃi:r], [tʃiçtlø], [tʃikxt], [tsu:nt], and [tsiçt]. Similarly final stops are assimilated to bilabial nasals, so that *bestimmt* and *kommt* become [pʃtʌmp] and [kɔmp]. How and to what extent Hutterites abandon such assimilated forms when they make the transition from the basic to the standard subsystem of their dialect remains unexplained. My own recordings of Hutterite to date come from noncommunal informants, in whose speech the distinctions reported by Rein are no longer clearly discernible.

My previous experience with German speech enclaves had not prepared me for the wide variety of bilingual-bidialectal situations I discovered on the Great Plains. "Normally" one spoke a German dialect in the home and with most members of the community. English, which was learned in school and from playmates, was used in business or social intercourse with poor, benighted outsiders who could not speak German (and thus had at best a very slim chance of getting through the Pearly Gates). Standard German was acquired in church, in school, and from older relatives. The acquisition process consisted in making minimal concessions to the written word, under constant admonitions to speak "mehr der Schrift nach." The imperfect and pluperfect indicative tenses were learned but never used in speaking. Cases had to be shifted: *gegen der Wand* became *gegen die Wand*. Some genders were changed: *der Butter*, *die Bach*, and *das Eck* became *die Butter*, *der Bach*, and *die Ecke*. Lexical substitutions were made: *sprechen* replaced *bappeln*, *schwätzen*, *reden*, *plaudern*, or *verzählen*. The trickiest aspect of this concession to the *Schriftsprache* was in the sound system. The acme of success was achieved when one could produce with a fair degree of consistency [v] instead of [β], [z-] instead of [s-], and the rounded front vowels [ø] and [y]. Unfortunately there were few occasions on which this highest possible form of High German could be displayed. In general Standard German was spoken with a rather marked Swabian or Franconian accent, which was also present, but usually to a lesser degree, in English. This, in brief, was the "normal" situation in the German enclaves with which I was familiar. Similar situations also prevail in some German language islands on the Great Plains, but not in all of them.

The most startling situation is the one alluded to above: individuals speak both English and German dialect without foreign accent but Standard German with virtually complete substitution of American phones. Three typical examples will suffice to illustrate this phenomenon. One of my chief informants for *Letzebergisch* (*Luxemburgisch*) was a delightful woman of eighty-eight who spoke her native dialect and English with equal fluency and with scarcely a trace of phonetic interference. During our third taping session she recited her daily prayer in Standard German. Although the words were German, the phones were American. The son of my first Volga-German informant speaks English

perfectly. Although his native dialect is dormant, he can produce words and phrases that are phonetically identical with the recordings of his father's dialect made thirty years ago. When he recites materials memorized from the catechism, however, he sounds like any other speaker of English for whom German is a totally foreign tongue. The last case is an American girl who was bilingual in childhood and completed the *Volksschule* and was confirmed in the Evangelical church in Heidelberg. After one year of high school and one summer of college German she had become bidialectal in German: with her American classmates she spoke as they did, and with Germans she spoke normal German.

How are such phonetic aberrations to be explained? In the first case I am inclined to believe that it was simply a matter of second-language interference. In the third case it could only have been peer pressure, a witting or unwitting desire to conform to group standards. In the second case we have both of these factors involved, reinforced by the formidable combination of background-erasure complex and adolescent rebellion against transmitted values that plagued many of us at times when *Deutschenhaß* became almost unendurable.

Deliberate modification of pronunciation and complete shift of dialect are far more frequent among German speakers on the Great Plains than I had anticipated.²⁶ This commonly occurs in childhood, and is one of the major forces leading to dialect amalgamation and the formation of *Ausgleichsmundarten*. Occasionally the speaker of a minority dialect will learn the majority dialect in order to communicate with neighbors. Not infrequently one's native dialect is abandoned in favor of that of a spouse if this is perceived to be a finer form of speech. I recorded an amusing example of this recently in North Dakota. In response to the stimulus sentence 'I don't remember that any more' a woman replied [des Bois iç numi]. Since this deviated markedly from previous responses by speakers of the local dialect, I tried to nudge my informant in the right direction by saying [māniçə sɑ:ʏə des βe:s iç nīmi]. To this she replied that she had formerly also spoken that way; but when her husband said this dialect was [Bi:ft] 'ugly,' she gave it up and learned to speak his.

To what extent can we determine on purely linguistic evidence the original homelands of the dialects discussed above? Both of the Low German dialects can be identified as East Frisian and Eastphalian despite the marked divergence brought about by the influence of Standard German and English, respectively. The dialect of Norka is unique in that it has retained primary characteristics of Central Hessian. It can therefore be located somewhere near Büdingen, but it cannot, of course, be identified with any local dialect (*Dorfmundart*). By contrast, Amana German and Balzer German have lost their original identity as Central Hessian dialects, and primarily under vertical influence have come to resemble, especially in their phonology, dialects spoken about one hundred miles southwest of Büdingen.

It is interesting to note that Balzer German, Amana German, and Volhynian Mennonite German share one phonetic change with each other and with virtually all Rhenish Franconian (mostly Palatine and Hessian) dialects I have recorded on the Great Plains: as in Standard German we find in these transplanted tongues the reduction of the three *e* and the two *ē* phones of Middle High German to two phonemes, /e/ and /e:/, which are usually realized as [e] and [e:]. At first blush we might be tempted to ascribe this phonetic reduction purely to influence from Standard German, but if this were so, we would be hard put to explain the fact

that many Hessian dialects, including those of Rimbach im Odenwald, Darmstadt, and Frankfurt/Main, have retained four *e* phonemes: /e e: ε ε:/.²⁷ On the other hand, the region southeast of Büdingen also reveals the same coalescence of *e* phones as Standard German and our three transplanted tongues, and in the remaining Central Hessian dialects the distinction between the reflexes of the three Middle High German *e* phones is in disarray, as a glance at maps 4-7 in Wiesinger's "Dialekte Hessens" will reveal (see note 9). In other words, the reduction of five Middle High German *e* phones to two phonemes, which occurred long ago in Balzer German and Amana German (and several centuries ago in Pennsylvania German), is now taking place in the Central Hessian dialects.

Since Standard German and many dialects get along splendidly with two *e* phonemes, the question rises as to why the other two or three were retained so long by Central Hessian and other German dialects. The answer, of course, is isolation and tradition. But the tourist trade and the need to commute to work in far places have largely overcome the former isolation and thus modified tradition in many regions of Germany. In the once isolated Rimbach only the oldest people and those who are locally employed still speak *Ourewällerisch*. Most younger people speak the regional *Umgangssprache*. In view of all this it seems quite possible that in due course the people of Büdingen will again be speaking the same language as their distant cousins, the Balzerer of Lincoln, Nebraska.

Cora Miller Connor's observation that there are no significant generational differences in the Freeman version of Volhynian Mennonite German applies also to the Moundridge version. Among the oldest speakers there is somewhat more interference from Standard German, whereas the tendency to substitute the American *r* for the apical trill is more noticeable among younger speakers.

In marked contrast to the Low German dialects investigated by Bender, the *Plautdietsch* of the Mennonite community in Henderson, Nebraska, is still a viable language that is habitually, or at least occasionally, spoken by most members of the community over the age of sixty.²⁸ Few individuals below the age of fifty can speak *Plautdietsch*, although many of them understand it rather well. English and Standard German interference is more noticeable in the lexicon than in the phonology. A major reason for the preservation of this Low German dialect for over a century in Nebraska is the fact that the large, compact community is predominantly Mennonite. The churches were the main social as well as religious centers. The Eastphalian and East Frisian communities studied by Bender simply lacked the necessary cultural focus, isolation, and "critical mass." Consequently the two languages fell into disuse when the passing of the oldest generation made the continued use of Low German unnecessary. Whereas second-generation speakers are comfortably bilingual, English is the dominant language for the third generation, and the phonology of the dialect, which is only infrequently heard and used, becomes destabilized.

Most of the instances of phonetic change discussed in this paper were sound replacements that were made on a word by word basis. In the Odenwald [fla:] and [brout] were among the first words to be replaced by Standard German forms. Older people retain the traditional pronunciation; younger people say *Fleisch* and *Brot*.²⁹ In a few isolated villages along the Volga like Norka the Central Hessian dialects could be preserved. In others, like Balzer, the language had to be accommodated to the superregional Rhenish Franconian *Um-*

gangssprache. As more and more dialect words are replaced by lexical items from Standard German or the regional *Umgangssprache*, the phonology of the language enclave is realigned. The new subsystems or series, however, are not always complete. Words that lack cognates in the *Umgangssprache* and words that are etymologically murky tend to resist replacement. But as we have seen, the dialect forms of even common words like *gesehen* can be preserved in the new *Ausgleichsmundart*.

Conversely individual Standard German forms can replace dialect forms and thus disrupt a series. A case in point is the Palatine dialect of Sutton, Nebraska, which resembles Pennsylvania German in the consistent reduction of short vowels before *r* plus consonant to /a/, realized as [a], [a], or [æ]. In this dialect, however *durch* is not pronounced [darɪç], but [durəç] with a [u] that is higher and tenser than that in Standard German. When on occasion the expected dialect form is used, the speaker is twitted for it and "corrected." The word *durch* may serve to illustrate the relationship between dialect geography and diachronic linguistics. As a glance at map five in my study of phonetic change in the Palatine dialects reveals, [darɪç] is attested for about sixty places along the Glan river from Bingen to an area southwest of Kusel. The prevailing form for the Palatinate, the Rhineland, and adjacent areas of Hesse is /dorx/. But Standard German *durch*, which is pressing in from the south and the northwest, occurs more frequently than the eighteenth-century [darɪç], which is preserved in Palatine dialects on the Great Plains. The older *a*-forms of *Durst* and *Wurst* are found in the same general area of those for *durch*, although not always in the same villages (see map four). The *o*-forms of *Durst* and *Wurst*, however, occupy a territory that is much larger and less indented than that of the *dorch* forms. In other words, the inroads of *durch* upon the dialects and the *Umgangssprachen* of the region are much stronger than those of *Durst* and *Wurst*. The reason for this seems to be the frequency with which the word *durch* occurs and the correspondingly frequently felt need of teachers to "correct" what they perceive to be substandard pronunciations.³⁰

However that may be, linguistic atlases with their relic and Standard German forms as well as isoglosses that theoretically should, but factually do not, coincide, and dialect enclaves, with their relic and Standard German forms as well as subsystems that lack perfect symmetry, tell the same story. Sound change in the language islands as well as in the homeland is a matter of sound importation on a word by word basis. The twice transplanted dialects of Balzer and Norka, both on the verge of extinction, have survived for over two centuries. Norka German has retained the primary features of its Central Hessian origins; Balzer German has lost these features, with the result that its sound system corresponds to that of Rhenish Franconian. Since our informants were all first-generation speakers, their language displayed little English influence—primarily the importation of [tʃ] as in the loanword [gəratʃ] 'garage' and the substitution of [ʒ] for [l]. The fate of Amana German was similar to that of Balzer, but both English and Standard German—primarily in the form of *Bibeldeutsch*—are stronger in the Amana colony. The complicated history of Volhynian Mennonite German in Europe has been thoroughly studied by Kurt Rein. Because of the relatively slight individual differences in the Freeman subdialect, it seems likely that a significant amount of lateral adjustment must have occurred shortly after immigration. There seems to be little phonological

difference, however, between the speech of the second and third generations. The somewhat more noticeable individual differences in the Moundridge version seems to be due to lateral influence from nearby enclaves of other German dialects.

The most remarkable sound changes brought about through English influence are those recorded by Bender for Eastphalian and East Frisian. In both dialects there was a reordering of the phonemic inventory and a shifting of the focus of articulation with lowering and opening of vowels and a tendency toward diphthongization and the retention of triphthongs. In the German homeland under the influence of Standard German the development of the sound system was diametrically opposed. The Nebraska versions of these dialects also exhibited consonantal aberrations (especially among homorganic consonants), the simplification of consonant clusters, and the loss of final consonants (especially such as do not occur in English). It seems quite likely, as Bender suggests, that the consonantal aberrations would have led to systemic changes, but this development has been cut short by the demise of these two dialects.³¹ The most remarkable fact about these and, indeed, all the phonetic changes discussed in this study, is the suddenness with which they occurred.

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Notes

¹ It is a pleasure gratefully to acknowledge support from the Research Council and the Center for Great Plains Studies of the University of Nebraska and from the National Endowment for the Humanities for my study of German dialects on the Great Plains.

² See Viktor Schirmunski, "Sprachgeschichte und Siedlungsmundarten," *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 18 (1930), 113-22, 171-89, and Paul Schach, "Zum Lautwandel im Rheinpfälzischen: die Senkung von kurzem Vokal zu *a* vor *r*-Verbindung," *Zeitschrift für Mundartforschung*, 26 (1958), 200-22.

³ For a preliminary analysis of Balzer German see Aina Sirks, "A Study of a Nebraska-German Dialect," M.A. Thesis Univ. of Nebraska 1956.

⁴ See Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans. With Particular Reference to the Volga Germans*, ed. Emma S. Haynes, Phillip P. Legler, and Gerda S. Walker (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1975), p. 105.

⁵ See Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration from Germany to Russia in the Years 1763-1862* (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1982), pp. 77-78.

⁶ See Jacob Volz, *Festschrift der Balzerer Wiedervereinigung* (Lincoln, NE: n.p., 1938), pp. 1-2.

⁷ See map 7, "Karte von Hessen mit den Orten, aus denen die Wolgadeutschen ausgewandert sind (1763-69)" (Lincoln, NE: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, n.d.).

⁸ See Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans*, pp. 81-84.

⁹ See Karl Stumpp, *The Emigration*, pp. 117-65.

¹⁰ See Peter Wiesinger, "Die Stellung der Dialekte Hessens im Mitteldeutschen," in *Sprache und Brauchtum. Bernhard Martin zum 90. Geburtstag*, ed. Reiner Hildebrandt and Hans Fiebertshäuser, Deutsche Dialektographie, Vol. 100 (N. G. Elwert Verlag: Marburg, 1980), pp. 68-148.

¹¹ See Bernhard Martin, "Deutsche Wortgeographie," rpt. in *Sprache und Brauchtum*, pp. 56, 59, and Georg Dinges, "Über Unsere Mundarten," in *Beiträge zur Heimatkunde des deutschen Wolgagebiets* (Pokrowsk: Abteilung für Volksbildung des Gebiets der Wolgadeutschen, 1923), p. 75.

¹² See Matthias Hagin, "Namhafte Wolgadeutsche," in *Heimatsbuch der Deutschen aus Rußland 1973-1981*, ed. Eduard Markstädter, Matthias Hagin, and Reinhold Keil (Stuttgart: Landsmann-

schaft der Deutschen aus Rußland, 1982), p. 152, and Ernst Christmann, *Der Lautbestand des Rheinfränkischen und sein Wandel in der Mundart von Kaulbach (Pfalz)* (Speyer am Rhein: Pfälzische Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Wissenschaften, 1927), pp. 1-2.

¹³ See Fred C. Koch, *The Volga Germans in Russia and the Americas from 1763 to the Present* (University Park and London: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 62-65, and Jacob Volz, *Festschrift*, pp. 5-6, where the names of the owners of mills and factories are recorded.

¹⁴ See Paul Schach, "Observations on Palatine and Hessian Dialects on the Great Plains," in a forthcoming *Festschrift*, and Dinges, "Über unsere Mundarten," p. 67.

¹⁵ See Schirmunski, "Sprachgeschichte und Siedlungsmundarten," pp. 112-22, 179-88.

¹⁶ The Norka dialect is currently being studied by Mary Lyn Tuck of the University of Nebraska, whose doctoral dissertation is being written under the direction of Dieter Karch.

¹⁷ Carroll E. Reed and Herbert F. Wiese, "Amana German," *American Speech*, 32 (1957), 243-56.

¹⁸ See Kurt Rein, *Religiöse Minderheiten als Sprachgemeinschaftsmodelle. Deutsche Sprachinseln täuferischen Ursprungs in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika*, *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik*, Beihefte NF 15 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1977), pp. 193-200; esp. p. 198.

¹⁹ See Cora Miller, "A Phonological and Morphological Study of a German Dialect Spoken near Freeman, South Dakota," M.A. Thesis Univ. of Nebraska 1966.

²⁰ See Rein, *Religiöse Minderheiten*, pp. 126-41.

²¹ See Schach, "Zum Lautwandel im Rheinpfälzischen," pp. 221-22 and the six linguistic maps, and Rein, *Religiöse Minderheiten*, pp. 132-34.

²² See Jan E. Bender, "Die getrennte Entwicklung gleichen Niederdeutschen Sprachgutes in Deutschland und Nebraska," Diss. Univ. of Nebraska 1970; "The Impact of English on a Low German Dialect in Nebraska," in *Languages in Conflict: Linguistic Acculturation on the Great Plains*, ed. Paul Schach (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1980), pp. 77-85; and "Consonantal Aberrations in Low German Dialects of the American West," *Selecta: Journal of the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages*, 1 (1980), 130-33.

²³ See Ernst Christmann, *Der Lautbestand des Rheinpfälzischen*, pp. 80-84.

²⁴ See Herfried Scheer, "The Hutterian German Dialect: A Study in Sociolinguistic Assimilation and Differentiation," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 54 (1980), 229-33, and Rein, *Religiöse Minderheiten*, p. 272.

²⁵ Edgar H. Sturtevant, *Linguistic Change: An Introduction to the Historical Study of Language* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1917), p. 34.

²⁶ For interesting parallels in Swedish see Folke Hedblom, "Swedish Dialects in the Midwest: Notes from Field Research," in *Languages in Conflict*, pp. 29-47.

²⁷ See Mary K. Schmidt, "A Phonological and Morphological Study of the Dialect Spoken in Rimbach im Odenwald," M.A. Thesis Univ. of Nebraska 1965, pp. 5, 7, 15; R. E. Keller, *German Dialects. Phonology and Morphology* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1961), p. 166; and Rein, *Religiöse Minderheiten*, p. 198.

²⁸ See Robert E. Buchheit, "Mennonite 'Plautdietsch': A Phonological and Morphological Description of a Settlement Dialect in York and Hamilton Counties," Diss. Univ. of Nebraska 1978. But note the marked individual differences (pp. 107-11), some of which resemble the phonological aberrations attested by Bender.

²⁹ See Mary K. Schmidt, "A Phonological and Morphological Study," pp. 1-3.

³⁰ See Schach, "Zum Lautwandel im Rheinpfälzischen," pp. 221-22.

³¹ See Bender, "Consonantal Aberrations," p. 133.

