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MICHAEL T. PUTNAM AND JOSEPH SALMONS

Multilingualism in the Midwest

How German Has Shaped (and Still Shapes) the Midwest

From 1815 to 1914, an estimated 5.5 million German speakers came to the United States, settling especially in the Midwest.¹ While popular culture tends to portray “German Americans” as relatively homogenous, they came from areas stretching from present day Belgium, France, and Switzerland through central and eastern Europe—and later from as far east as Siberia. Moreover, they spoke many radically different varieties of “German,” often more different from one another than French is from Spanish. That is, these were not mutually intelligible varieties, and so they cross the usual definitional line for linguists between “dialects,” where speakers can communicate across varieties, and “languages,” where they cannot. We argue that the German language in this broad sense continues to have a fundamental impact on midwestern cultures and identities. To this end, we respond to Jon K. Lauck’s call for a renewed focus on midwestern history, using this discussion as an opportunity to dispel some myths about language in particular and showing some persistent patterns of influence throughout the region today.²

We provide three case studies which all support the central thesis that the linguistic landscape of the Midwest has been—and continues to be—profoundly shaped by German, often indirectly and mostly not in the expected ways. First, two persistent myths about Germans are that immigrants learned English quickly after arrival and that “anti-German sentiment” in the World War I era meant the end of the German language in the region. In fact, Germans did not necessarily learn English quickly; nonetheless, the shift to English was well underway before the First World War

on the one hand and on the other, German continues to be spoken even today. This history of language use and shift can help us reconsider language issues among new immigrants in the Midwest, with implications for education and policy. Second, midwestern English has been—and is being—shaped by German influence, but not in the ways one might think. Clichés of German-influenced speech have surely receded, but important structural influence is present and still developing today. Third, German immigration is not something only of the past: speakers of languages and dialects considered in some sense to be “German” are still immigrating to the Midwest in surprisingly high numbers. These case studies illustrate how the history of German in the Midwest can and should inform contemporary discussions about immigration and immigration issues. Ultimately, these case studies show how German-speaking immigrants continue to shape the landscape of the Midwest even today.

The rest of the paper is structured around these three case studies—learning English and abandoning German, the shaping of midwestern English, and a resurgence of “German” immigration to the region. At the same time, our changing understanding of the issues bears on the historiography of the Midwest—and language and immigration in particular. We discuss how our understanding of German immigration to the Midwest still sometimes remains in the shadow of filiopietism and even occasionally still the stain of connections to Nazi “research.” Taken together, we hope that these case studies suggest a blueprint for future collaborative studies between linguists and specialists in other disciplines such as anthropology, education, history, and sociology.

I. Learning English and Abandoning German

Much of the popular and occasionally even scholarly understanding of Germans and their languages in the Midwest resides in two narratives. The first is that the German speakers were model immigrants with regard to language—that is, that they learned English quickly after arrival. The second is that World War I led to the death of German in the region. Both are, judging from available evidence, largely incorrect.

Before continuing, we need to clarify an important terminological matter: In immigration or other situations where languages come into contact with one another, linguists distinguish between the two situations discussed in the previous paragraph: (1) the learning of a new language (that



Fig. 1. Lester W. J. “Smoky” Seifert interviewing a German speaker in 1940s Wisconsin. Photograph donated by the Seifert family to the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison, and reproduced here by their courtesy.

is, German speakers becoming bilingual in English); and (2) the abandonment of the immigrant language (that is, German-English communities becoming English monolingual over time, with bilingual parents raising their children as English monolinguals), a process that specialists call “language shift.” The former creates a situation of language contact within individual speakers—or bilingual brains—while the latter, language shift, eliminates language contact. Let us deal with them in turn.

One of the most glaringly false but resilient myths in American history and politics, from the colonial period to the present, is that immigrants to this country do not learn English; rather, they actively resist using it and even their children do not learn it. Exponents of this myth, across time and space, have often contrasted the presumed language acquisition patterns of contemporary immigrants with those earlier immigrants, who ostensi-

bly mastered English quickly. This is a longstanding refrain in American political discourse, with complex historical origins, but it remains strong even today. For instance, conservative scion Michael Reagan lamented in a 2006 essay:

All across the U.S., hordes of immigrants—legal and illegal—are chattering away in their native language and have no intention of learning English—the all-but-official language of the United States where they now live. . . . Can you blame them? They are being enabled by all those diversity fanatics to defy the age-old custom of immigrants to our shores who made it one of their first priorities to learn to speak English and to teach their offspring to do likewise.³

Research by scholars from many different disciplines and perspectives shows, however, that the exact opposite holds true: immigrants learn English as quickly as they can.⁴ As is so often the case, historical (mis)interpretation serves to keep this myth alive. As linguist James Crawford puts the myth, en route to debunking it: “Today’s immigrants refuse to learn English, unlike the good old immigrants of yesteryear.”⁵ The social settings of bilingualism have of course changed dramatically. Our point is not that these situations are comparable but simply that they are treated as such in much public discourse.

Our focus here is on the historical claims about “good old immigrants.” In fact, a steadily growing body of research shows that many immigrants and their descendants remained monolingual in their immigrant languages after over a half century or more living in the U.S. and several generations later. The 1910 Census asked about all individuals over the age of ten whether they were able to speak English and, if not, what language they spoke. Such data is fraught with problems, but it can serve as a rough gauge of how many people remained monolingual at the time. One factor, for instance, suggests that non-English monolingualism may be seriously underreported: The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a time of great xenophobia: The Nativist and Know Nothing movements found great popular support, and language offered a fertile battleground in immigration debates.⁶ Because of political and social pressure placed upon immigrants to learn English, speakers might have had concrete motivations to over- rather than underestimate their ability to speak English.

As an example, in the village of Hustisford, in eastern Wisconsin, twenty-four percent of residents reported being monolingual in German

in 1910, well over a half century after the main immigration to the community.⁷ Over a third of the reported monolinguals were born in the U.S. This included numerous third generation monolinguals—grandchildren of European immigrants who had not learned English—in 1910. Farther to the north, one scholar found that in a census district in New Holstein, twenty-eight percent reported being monolingual, with forty-nine of those born in the U.S.⁸ No contemporary immigrant community has been documented as “resisting” learning English to nearly this extent. In short, these immigrants hardly consistently abandoned German quickly; indeed, they often did not learn English for a couple of generations and, contrary to popular belief, they have often held on their language generations longer than contemporary immigrants.

A second myth concerns the role that World War I played in the decline and death of German in the Midwest. It is still widely believed that World War I was a primary cause of this demise—we often hear this misconception in community outreach talks and informally from scholars as well. As one older source puts it, World War I was for German Americans “a thunderclap from a cloudless sky.”⁹ The simple existence of today’s speakers and hundreds of thousands of others born and raised with German as their first language long after the war—when it was often used in church and worship services, school, and elsewhere—disproves this myth. But the story is richer, as we discuss below.

A coherent and testable theory is now emerging of why communities do (or do not) maintain languages.¹⁰ This growing body of research builds around Roland L. Warren’s theory of a “Great Change” in American community structure.¹¹ Previous works tended to see language shift in terms of “prestige” and various local considerations or as simply a mundane process of assimilation to surrounding societal patterns. In this new view, language shift is seen as coming along with “verticalization,” shift of control from local to non-local hands. According to this theory, language loss is driven by broad forces transforming community structure, primarily by the displacement of locally interconnected organizational structures in favor of ones connected primarily to extra-community organizations. Before the change, communities were relatively autonomous, with local institutions tied more closely to one another than to state or national ones. In this period, what happened in local schools was driven by local cultural and economic needs and desires—closing schools at harvest time or for deer season, for instance. Over time, control of institutions “verticalizes,” or

moves beyond local control, whether in governmental, economic, or private institutional contexts. After these changes are carried out, the support structure for minority languages within a community steadily erodes.

The patterns of Wisconsin German monolingualism described above were facilitated by the relatively large German-speaking population and supported by a full range of institutions in the German language—such as schools, churches, newspapers, and labor unions. As scholars have demonstrated, some individuals began shifting to English immediately upon arrival, and some culturally German institutions were established in English, but vast numbers of people continued to use German and established institutions in that tongue.¹² Over time, institutions came under various kinds of pressure to switch to English, but the full impact of this language shift did not occur in connection with the dramatic events associated with the last century. For schools, many states passed laws restricting or even banning instruction in German, like Wisconsin's Bennett Law in 1889, but that law and some others were repealed relatively quickly, and states had limited ability to enforce such laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹³

The most noticeable changes came at the hands of increasing state control of education, which meant that schools were ever more tightly regulated, including with regard to language. In the press, the war had a profound impact on this industry, as some papers folded or switched to English. But the larger impact was from economic changes, which made small papers in any language less and less viable over time. Larger and larger circulations became necessary to make newspapers and magazines economically viable. With this, smaller German language publications failed, just as smaller circulation English language papers have been going out of business for over a century.¹⁴ In religion, the shift to English was long and often hotly debated, but some churches only shifted to English after German-speaking clergy were no longer available.¹⁵ That is, the shift was driven not by a desire to switch services to English but by an inability to conduct them in German in some instances.

Across this range of institutions—public education, private business, and religion—we witness the lessening of local control in favor of non-local control. In each, that change undermines the position of German, much less as a matter of policy or proclamation and much more as part of an integration into broader, English-speaking society. Warren's model of "verticalization" as part of a sweeping change in community structure

captures neatly the processes we see at work here, and today's highly vertical social structure in the United States is consistent with the very rapid shift to English among newer immigrants. This, we argue, is the most fundamental difference between past and present immigrants with regard to learning English, as alluded to above.

Once again, these historical cases tie in to and inform contemporary hot-button issues relevant to the Midwest and beyond. As already suggested above, the pressure on immigrant language speakers to shift to English is a thread running from the colonial period down to the present day, fed by repeated waves of xenophobia.¹⁶ With regard to Wisconsin's burgeoning Spanish-speaking population, Catherine Stafford writes:

Language policies that favor educating children monolingually in English over developing and maintaining bilingualism are perhaps a vestige of misconceptions that grew out of research findings published in the xenophobic climate of the first half of the twentieth century. These ideologically tainted studies concluded that bilingualism meant imperfect mastery of two languages (referred to by some pejoratively as "semilingualism") and that it could lead to cognitive confusion, even schizophrenia, and was therefore to be avoided. Of course, these claims have long since been discredited, but unfortunately, the destructive, narrow-minded ideologies associated with them persist.¹⁷

Stafford's comments speak to modern misconceptions harbored by some that bilingualism in a pluralistic society is a hindrance rather than an asset, both for individuals and society as a whole. This negative view of bilingualism was also present in sociological work early in the last century. Bilinguals and bilingualism in general has traditionally been considered a hindrance individually and at a societal level, according to scholars such as Izhak Epstein, who states *la polyglossie est une plaie sociale* ("multilingualism is a social ill").¹⁸ Elaborating on this point—but certainly not sharing his view—Aneta Pavlenko explains, "Since bilingualism could be particularly harmful for young children whose thought processes were still developing, [Epstein's] recommendation was to begin foreign-language instruction in later childhood and to limit it to reading and basic everyday expressions."¹⁹ These sorts of misconceptions about bilingualism naturally had an impact in shaping public opinions about bilingual individuals and communities, but also education policy as we have discussed above.



Fig. 2. A barn in El Soberbio, Misiones, Argentina. In the summer of 2012, Michael T. Putnam conducted field work on German-language heritage speakers in Argentina. Photograph by Michael T. Putnam.

The view of bilingualism as a “social ill” has since been repeatedly and thoroughly debunked from a variety of research perspectives. Modern research in psycholinguistics and neurolinguistics has presented a wide ranging of compelling evidence that, in contrast to Epstein and his contemporaries’ views of bilingualism exhibiting “une influence negative ou inhibitrice” (a negative or inhibitory influence), bilinguals actually display distinct cognitive advantages when compared with their monolingual counterparts, such as a delay in the onset of dementia and other debilitating cognitive illnesses such as Alzheimer’s disease.²⁰ Furthermore, research shows that the amounts of white matter in the brain and grey matter in the cerebellum increase over the course of a bilingual’s lifespan.²¹ That is, bilingualism has positive, lifelong effects on individual cognition, in addition to its social, political, and economic values. Beyond that, understanding this history is now driving work to support language revitalization efforts underway in Native American and other communities: A workable theory of language shift will yield insight into how to reverse it, and

that workable theory may be the one emerging now from the study of German in the American Midwest.²²

To sum up, German speakers hardly all learned English on or even shortly after arrival in the United States, and the view that World War I was the death knell of the German language in America was overstated. The bilingual tradition in the Midwest continues to enrich the landscape as new languages come into the region, including Somali, Russian, Laotian, and many others. These immigrants are learning English much faster and probably shifting to English much more quickly than Germans did.

At the same time, the linguistic impact of German is hardly limited to German-English bilingualism. In the next section, we consider the role that heritage immigrant German has played in the development of midwestern English.

II. Midwestern English and the Role of German

In talking to public audiences about the influence of German on English in the Midwest, we often hear examples of words and stereotypes, especially from older people—for example, words like *hausfrau* (“housewife”) and *dummkopf* (“dumb person”) or phrases like *danke schön* (“thank you”).²³ As Von Schneidemesser shows with a series of maps, these terms are often regional, concentrated in the Midwest and Pennsylvania, areas of particularly heavy settlement by speakers of German dialects.²⁴ These words also appear, based on our experience, to be recessive, mostly used by older speakers today, though a few have established themselves in the region. *Brat(wurst)*, “kind of sausage” is a familiar example of this shift. Another case in point is *bakery*. For most Americans, it means a place where baked goods are produced, but especially in Wisconsin it can refer to the product—“people might be hungry, so we should bring some bakery to the meeting.” This reflects a dialectal meaning of the German term *Bäckerei*, “bakery.”

Beyond borrowed words, Howell provides an excellent survey of structural patterns reported in midwestern (and Pennsylvania) English that appear to reflect German influence. Examples include unexpected verb tenses and verbal “aspect” like *I am here ten years* (instead of “have been”); *Did you hear the lecture last night? I have heard it* (instead of expected simple past “heard,” both from Milwaukee); and “semantic impositions” like *make the light out, make out the light* (following the use of German *machen* [“to make”] in such constructions, from Illinois and Wisconsin).²⁵ Some stereotypes of

German influenced English, like *throw mama down the stairs a kiss* (associated by cliché, for example with Milwaukee), likely existed only among native speakers of German with limited command of English.

Subtler patterns have only begun to be investigated. Consider constructions like *Sheboygan is a city people like when they visit* vs. *Sheboygan is a city people like when they visit it*. The former pattern is widely used in American English (and preferred by some speakers) while the equivalent of the second (with the pronoun “it” at the end) is the direct English translation of the German sentence (which requires the last pronoun to be present). Since these structures are ones that speakers are typically unaware of and which are not discussed in school or grammatical texts, we might expect a subtle German influence here. While Wisconsin German-English bilinguals and some older monolingual English speakers from Wisconsin show a tendency to prefer German-like patterns—requiring the final pronoun, “it,” to be present—this preference has since largely disappeared. Younger English monolingual speakers appear to prefer the structure without the pronoun.²⁶

The “German influenced” structures that remain in broad use today are largely a variety of patterns that laypeople may think of as “grammatical,” but which in fact largely reflect changes in the usage of particular words in German-like ways. Examples include *what for* (German: *was für*) or the verbal particle *with* in clauses like *Are you coming with?* (German: *kommst du mit?*). This last construction, for instance, expands on an extant set of “verb-particle constructions” in English—“to come around”—rather than representing a structural innovation in English grammar. It is today unremarkable throughout much of the Midwest and is even used beyond it.

Changing pronunciations of the /æ/ vowel—the vowel found in words like *bad, ban, bag, back*—is characteristic of many regions, and certain parts of the Midwest show pronunciations of this vowel more like the common American vowel [ɛ], as in *bed, Ben, beg, Beck*, or even [e:] as in *bade, bane, vague, bake*. Since most kinds of German lack /æ/, and German speakers often replace it with [ɛ] or [e:], this has been attributed to German influence. However, this is less than certain and the changes could be “internal,” not driven by contact. Moreover, the vowel /æ/ is lacking in most of the immigrant languages of the region—Polish, Dutch, and so on—so if this were an effect of earlier language contact, it would reflect a broader immigrant phenomenon rather than an exclusively German one. The same holds for “stopping” of English “th” sounds in *thing* or *this* (interdental fricatives, phonetic [θ, ð]) to *d*, so that *those things there* can be produced as *dose dings*

dere or *dose tings dere*. Here, though, stigmatization plays a role, as teachers and others have worked to stamp out such forms—though the *d* pronunciations are still regularly heard in parts of the region today, including among young speakers—just as many stigmatized features survive and thrive in various social groups and regions.

Far more remarkable, however, are the changes in a set of other patterns. German does not distinguish word-final sounds by “voicing,” so *s ffi z*, *t ffi d*, etc. are pronounced the same, a phenomenon called “final devoicing.”²⁷ This pattern can be heard in heavily German settled regions today, so that *buzz* is pronounced more or less like *bus* and *bed* like *bet*. Recent studies show that this is not a direct continuation of German-like pronunciation—that is, the direct carrying over of a German accent into the English of later generations.²⁸ Instead, older speakers and speakers in historical recordings overpronounce the “voicing” of final *z*, *d*, and others. It is only today’s younger speakers who produce the devoiced variants, people who represent a population with little or no direct connection to German. Similar “boomerang” effects—where immigrant-influenced features recede with language shift only to return after language shift is far advanced—exist in other situations of language contact like in Cajun English.²⁹ This may reflect a sociolinguistic “reallocation,” where particular linguistic features continue to be used, but with new social meaning. In this instance, formerly ethnic/immigrant speech features are used to mark new regional and local identities.

This opens the door to seeing the bigger picture of language in the region: in the Upper Midwest, distinctive dialects are only now beginning to emerge, and with them awareness of distinctive accents. Kathryn Remlinger, Luanne von Schneidmesser, and Joseph Salmons show that awareness of distinctive speech patterns in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and in Wisconsin is recent, a finding supported by graphing the occurrences of “Wisconsin accent” and “North Carolina accent” in NGram Viewer, which searches huge sets of printed books for words and phrases.³⁰

Wisconsin and North Carolina were historically of similar population size. (Both had around two million residents in 1900, and 4.4 vs. five million in 1970.) But as fig. 3 shows, references to “North Carolina accent” begin far earlier and are vastly more common. Work still in progress provides strong evidence that Wisconsin listeners are far better at recognizing younger Wisconsin speakers as being Wisconsinites than older ones. Wisconsin speakers recorded in 2010 were identified as being from Wis-

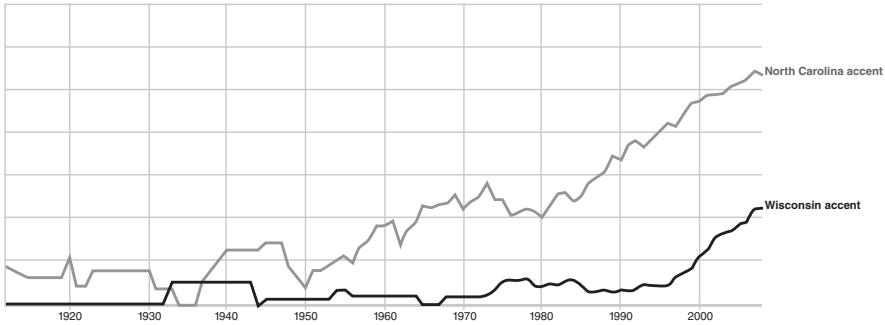


Fig. 3. This graph illustrates the discernible gap between popular references to a “North Carolina accent” and to a “Wisconsin accent.” Source: Google Books Ngram Viewer, <http://books.google.com/ngrams>.

consin much more often than those recorded in the 1950s or 1960s. Rates for non-Wisconsin speakers—from Boston, North Carolina, and southern California—did not show these effects.³¹

This timing is reminiscent of the “devoicing” patterns described above, and that may be more than coincidence: though popular views see dialect diversity in the U.S. as being on the decline, many studies have shown that some American dialects are in fact rapidly becoming more different from one another, especially the midwestern ones. We know from a large body of research that when new areas are settled by speakers of a new language, it takes at least three to four generations for a coherent, recognizable new dialect to emerge.³² In the German-speaking Midwest, this process could have only begun in many communities with the shift to English as a first language. That is, the presence of immigrant languages (and English influenced by German) likely delayed the onset of new dialect formation. The German contributions to midwestern English dialects came along at roughly the same time, long after Germans had arrived in the state and as German was no longer a widely spoken language in the region.

III. New “German” Speakers in the Midwest

So far, we have talked about German varieties that have reached their last generation of speakers and their effects on regional English. Not all varieties in the region find themselves in this situation, and we illustrate this with two examples, one likely familiar to most midwesterners and the

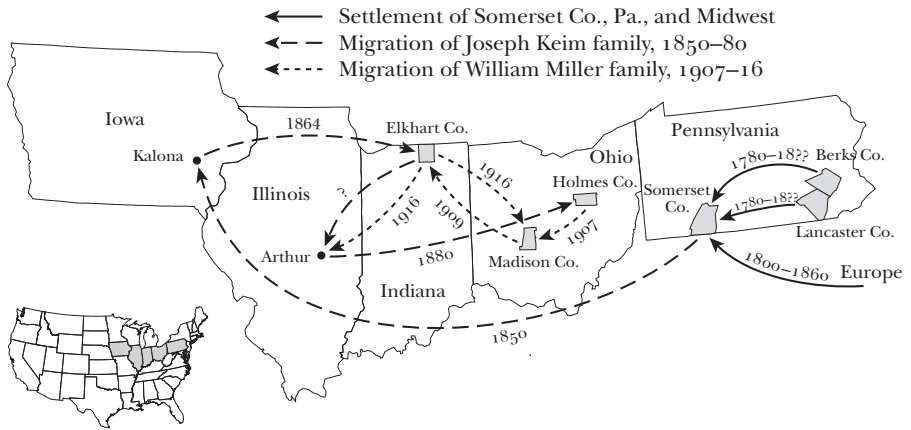


Fig. 4. This map highlights the locations of major midwestern Amish communities in the nineteenth century, as well as the movements of selected Amish families. Map originally appeared in Steven Hartman Keiser, *Pennsylvania German in the American Midwest* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012) and is reproduced here courtesy of the publisher.

other much less so. “Pennsylvania German” or “Pennsylvania Dutch”—called *Deitsch* by its speakers—is spoken in the Midwest alone by an estimated 160,000 people, who are almost all Old Order Amish and Old Order Mennonite, and their numbers are growing rapidly.³³ With dialectal origins mostly in present-day southwestern Germany, Pennsylvania German developed into an independent language in colonial Pennsylvania with generations of isolation from European German speakers. The map below illustrates some of the major migration routes from Pennsylvania across the Midwest; today there are large communities in most midwestern states, with, for example, 375 settlements in Ohio, 246 in Indiana, ninety-three in Wisconsin, forty in Iowa, and forty-nine in Missouri.³⁴

In these communities, the language continues to be transmitted to children and used in daily life. As just noted, the number of speakers is growing rapidly, due to early marriage and large families. Today the midwestern dialects are diverging from the varieties spoken in Pennsylvania.

Another recently arrived population in the region speaks a dramatically different Germanic language, a form of Low German, the indigenous language of northern Germany. So-called “Old Colony Mennonites” use the language known as “Mennonite Low German,” or *Plautdietsch*, in the home and for worship services. They have roots in the Netherlands and northwestern Germany (with Dutch influences but primarily Low German lin-

guistic origins) from the sixteenth century. After migrating to West Prussia (Danzig) in the middle of the sixteenth century to avoid religious persecution and spending approximately two hundred years there, many then migrated to South Russia beginning in 1789. Starting in 1875 many migrated to the Prairie Provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Canada. Following World War I, about seven thousand of these Canadian Old Colonists went south, and established an autonomous colony in the province of Chihuahua, Mexico. When economic conditions in Chihuahua deteriorated in the 1970s, an outmigration began—some to Canada, some to South America, some to Seminole, Texas (where approximately five thousand now live), and in the late 1970s to Kansas. Mennonite Low German has traditionally been strictly an oral language, like Pennsylvania German. In recent decades, Epp has created a working orthography for this language and Thiesen an excellent dictionary and a brief, accessible history of the language.³⁵

In 1998, the Kansas Statewide Farmworkers Health Program (KSFHP) registered 141 Mennonites from Mexico, representing seven percent of the total farmworkers served. By 2004, 1,452 Mennonites from Mexico were registered, representing forty-three percent. In 2009, KSFHP characterized this population as highly mobile, having no emphasis on formal education, a low literacy rate, and religiously conservative. The number served by KSFHP in 2009 was 1,599. By one estimate, there were approximately four to five thousand Old Colony Mennonite migrant farmworkers in Kansas in 2007.³⁶

Because of this unique migration background and language learning history, this group presents important opportunities to understand multilingual language development and linguistic and social identity across several generations in the Midwest. From a linguistic standpoint, the documentation and analysis of the three languages spoken within this group—Mennonite Low German, Spanish, and English—will reveal a great deal about language maintenance, language loss/attrition, and the development of English as a third language (L3) in this group. Of equal importance, and returning to our first case study concerning the “abandonment of German,” given the overwhelming recent scientific evidence documenting the cognitive and societal benefits of bilingualism, it will be interesting to see how educational policy is shaped to accommodate this population in an extremely rural setting in southwestern Kansas.

This last case study serves as a valuable reminder that “German” in the Midwest often requires the scare quotes: the two new varieties just discussed, Pennsylvania German and Plautdietsch, are not comprehensible to speakers of contemporary standard German, and they are farther apart

from one another than from today's European German. The same holds for many of the other German(ic) languages spoken in the region, from Pomeranian Low German (still spoken in central Wisconsin) to "Schweitzer" German (in Moundridge, Kansas, with origins in the Palatinate, despite the name). At the same time, some form of standard German, in writing and to a lesser degree in speaking, was and even now is known in the Midwest. This kind of linguistic diversity is a focus for us as linguists, but it also underscores that there is no group of "midwestern Germans," but rather myriad distinct and sometimes related communities with their own histories. Here too, this has powerful parallels in contemporary immigration—from the dialectal diversity of Hmong (spoken especially in Minnesota and Wisconsin) on to Spanish, about which Stafford writes: "individuals who self-identify or are identified as Hispanic include monolingual English speakers, monolingual Spanish speakers, and bilingual/multilingual individuals whose relative proficiency in Spanish, English, and in some cases Latin American indigenous languages varies widely."³⁷ If midwesterners understand the German part of their history, we argue, it will facilitate understanding and accepting contemporary linguistic diversity.

IV. The German Language in the Context of Midwestern History

In the foregoing, we have laid out three case studies particular to language, issues which are rooted in and connected to the writing of midwestern regional history. Any history is constructed and contested over various ideological tensions, including the history of German and Germans in the American Midwest. In this section, we connect the linguistic issues raised above to two such issues: the pitfalls of writing history focused on the contributions of German Americans on the one hand and a reliance on research from the Nazi era on the other.

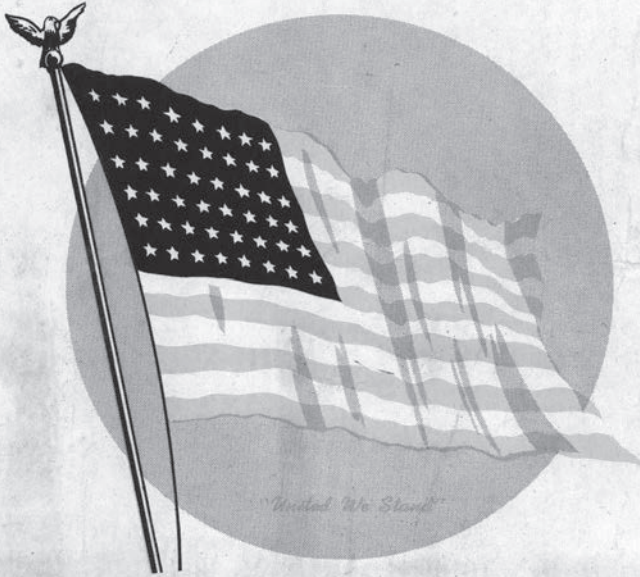
The first is often talked about under the rubric of what scholars like Brent O. Peterson or Joseph Salmons call "filiopietism" or what Robert Frizzell describes as a "contributionist" approach: Much or even most earlier work on German in the Midwest was written by people who came from the communities they wrote about, and such works can reflect uncritical views held within the community and consciously or unconsciously promote a positive view of the community and its history.³⁸ The discussion above of the situation of German Americans in the World War I era already reflects the perspective of German Americans, typical of early scholarship

generally and illustrated above in Carl Wittke's work. This thread continues into the present century. Frizzell writes about a book published in 2000 that generally presented a view of German American history "as written decades ago," but its treatment of the World War I era is "thoroughly up-to-date in that it is a part of the contemporary American culture of competitive victimization. Most scholars who study German Americans recognize that Germans in America are not strong players at this game."³⁹ Indeed, only a remarkably parochial perspective on American history could see the German American experience in terms of actual "persecution," compared to other groups—for instance, the attempted genocide of Indigenous populations, followed by boarding schools aimed in part at destroying communities' cultures and specifically their languages; enslaved populations brought forcibly from Africa and subjected to widespread violence and profound discrimination long after emancipation; and the Chinese Exclusion Act. But such views of German American persecution still shape some scholarly thinking.

World War I was certainly a difficult time to be a German speaker in the United States.⁴⁰ Still, as argued throughout the present paper and much other modern research, the war and that period by no means killed the German language in this country. Nor, as we have argued, were German speakers "model" immigrants in terms of learning English or abandoning German. The list of less politically charged but still historically and scientifically important skewing of history in this way could be expanded considerably. For instance, it is not uncommon to hear comments in communities about their languages as "archaic 19th century dialects" from the "Old Country." This contrasts throughout much of the Midwest and elsewhere with the very real presence of standard German, in an active press, in religious institutions and as a medium of instruction of countless schools. What is needed, we assert, is to understand this history including its positive and negative aspects within the full context of American history and society.

The second issue is a significant but still widely unrecognized entanglement of work on the German language in the U.S. with National Socialism. We were surprised by comments from someone who read an earlier version of this paper and who suggested forcefully that we needed to cite the work of Heinz Kloss: "Kloss did major studies about the German language throughout the United States, producing a huge atlas along the way." This is indeed true, but this work was done for the Nazi "German Foreign Institute." Cornelia Wilhelm writes the following about Kloss and the relevant project:

Die Hausfrau



Juli
1943

Monatsschrift für die Frauenwelt Amerikas
Milwaukee, Wis.

Fig. 5. A World War II-era example of patriotic images from a German-language magazine, *Die Hausfrau*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Courtesy of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

He collected information for the publication of a German-American atlas, which was to document the German contribution to America, but also to help German political agencies to understand the local communities, their setting, and conditions. The information was to help them make their political decisions regarding propaganda and military planning. Although the outcome of the two large projects was used by the political agencies, both projects were not published until the 1970s, when they were finally published by La Vern Rippley, an American scholar, as an “academic work” valuing Kloss’s works as major research achievements without mentioning their origins, original context, and purpose.⁴¹

Kloss was in fact not a linguist, and Wilhelm makes a strong case that his work should be understood to a great extent not as scholarship, but rather as political propaganda for the National Socialist government. The crux of this message was, in Wilhelm’s words, to present:

[a . . .] history based on the supposed “fact” that “Germans” still lived in large and connected parts of the United States, having maintained their supposed Germanness. In Kloss’ eyes it was mainly the Germans who had invested work in the cultivation of American soil, and his research concluded that there was a strong connection between the achievements of the German people and the American soil. He claimed that America was only “cultivated” by their work.⁴²

Wilhelm points out that there was for many of these people of German ancestry no connection to a German identity at all.⁴³ For instance, people who had fled persecution in German-speaking Europe to come to North America had no strong reasons to identify with Germanness. Many other German speakers came, as noted at the outset, from far outside of modern day Germany and/or came long before German unification in 1871, so that any “German identity” was complex and tenuous even on arrival. More importantly, many German speakers in the Midwest expressly adopted American identities.⁴⁴

With regard to the broader aims of Kloss’s research, Wilhelm writes that “the policies outlined by Kloss never had a long-term impact upon the German American community and the German ‘folk islands.’”⁴⁵ That is surely true, but, as we have been reminded once again, his impact on contemporary scholarship remains often much greater, as shown by the admonition that we should see his contributions as central to understanding German in the U.S.

For both traditions of “contributionist” historiography and propagandistically tinged writings passing as “major studies,” we urge a more critical engagement, both in terms of a richer understanding of the full context of American immigration history and immigrant languages.

Our three case studies point to both a kind of coherence of experience in the Midwest and a rich local diversity in those experiences. More importantly, in each instance, a nuanced and detailed investigation of bilinguals past and present dispersed throughout the American Midwest, broadly conceived, can inform our thinking about current issues, and lead to new research opportunities connecting various disciplines. At the same time, as argued just above, understanding the importance of German in the Midwest demands reexamination of some points of regional history, particularly with regard to language.

Understanding the long and complex process of German speakers learning English and eventually abandoning German strengthens the more positive view of bilingualism, immigrant and otherwise, that has emerged in various academic fields today. Certain obvious “German” features of midwestern English have receded, but a whole new set of features is firmly established as on the rise, often signaling new kinds of social group membership. The arrival of new communities in our region, *Deitsch* or *Plautdietsch*, continue long traditions and show that instead of “German” we have many “Germans,” just as in some sense there are many “Midwests.”

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State (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013). His work focuses on language change in the context of linguistic theory, drawing data especially from Germanic languages, including American English and heritage languages spoken in the U.S.

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NOTES

1. Günter Moltmann, "The Pattern of German Emigration to the United States in the Nineteenth Century," in *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-hundred Year History*, vol. 1, ed. Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 14.

While our focus here is directly on language-related issues, note that there is a very rich literature on the history of German communities across this region, as these few key examples suggest: Kathleen Neils Conzen, *Immigrant Milwaukee, 1836–1860: Accommodation and Community in a Frontier City* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976); idem, *Germans in Minnesota* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2003); Philip E. Webber, *Kolonie-Deutsch: Life and Language in Amana* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993); Walter D. Kamphoefner, "German Americans: Paradoxes of a 'Model Minority,'" in *Origins and Destinies: Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America*, ed. Silvia Pedraza and Rubén G. Rumbaut (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1996), 152–60; William Keel and Kurt Rein, eds., *German Emigration from Bukovina to the Americas* (Lawrence, Kan.: Max Kade Center for German-American Studies, 1996); Joachim Reppmann, *North Germans in America 1847–1860* (Preetz: Verlag für Amerikanistik/Hesperian Press, 1999); Gordon Scott Seeger, "Socio-economic Influence on Low German in North-Central Kansas: From Immigrant Language Lost to Heritage Language Revived" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2007); Heike Bungert, Cora Lee Kluge, and Robert C. Ostergren, eds., *Wisconsin German Land and Life* (Madison, Wis.: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 2006); Stefan Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora: The "Greater German Empire," 1871–1914* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

For accessible general surveys and rich anthologies, see Frank Trommler and Joseph McVeigh, eds., *America and the Germans: An Assessment of a Three-hundred Year History*, vols. 1 and 2 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 1985; Josef Raab and Jan Wirrer, eds., *Die Deutsche Präsenz in den USA* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2008).

Many excellent histories also address matters pertinent to German American communities. For work on women's organizations see Anke Ortlepp, "Auf denn, Ihr Schwestern!" *Deutschamerikanische Frauenvereine in Milwaukee (Wisconsin), 1844–1914* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2004). For the impact of the First World War, see Katja Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im Ersten Weltkrieg: US-Politik und Nationale Identitäten im Mittleren Westen*

(Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007). For singing societies, see Heike Bungert, "Deutsch-amerikanische Sängervereine und Lieder als Medium der Ethnizitätsbildung, 1849–1914," *Lied und populäre Kultur* 55 (2010), 41–76.

Several collections treat the languages and dialects of these communities and beyond. See Glenn Gilbert, ed., *The German Language in America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971); Joseph C. Salmons, ed., *The German Language in America: 1683–1991* (Madison, Wis.: Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies, 1993); Michael T. Putnam, ed., *Studies on German-Language Islands* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2011).

2. Jon K. Lauck, *The Lost Region: Toward a Revival of Midwestern History* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013).

3. Michael Reagan, "English: The Vanishing Language," *Human Events*, Aug. 25, 2006, humanevents.com/article.php?id=16676.

For a discussion of Reagan's essay and other similar examples, see Miranda E. Wilkerson and Joseph Salmons, "'Good Old Immigrants of Yesteryear' Who Didn't Learn English: Germans in Wisconsin," *American Speech* 83, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 259–83; idem, "Linguistic Marginalities: Becoming American without Learning English," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2012), escholarship.org/uc/item/5ynog2kk.

4. For an accessible overview, see Lucy Tse, "Why Don't They Learn English?" *Separating Fact from Fallacy in the U.S. Language Debate* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

5. James Crawford, *At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety* (Cleveland, England: Multilingual Matters, 2000), 6.

6. William F. Thompson, ed., *The History of Wisconsin*, vols. 1–6 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973–98); Crawford, *At War with Diversity*; Wüstenbecker, *Deutsch-Amerikaner im ersten Weltkrieg*.

7. Wilkerson and Salmons, "'Good Old Immigrants of Yesteryear'"; idem, "Linguistic Marginalities"; Miranda E. Wilkerson, Mark Livengood, and Joseph Salmons, "The Sociohistorical Context of Imposition in Substrate Effects: German Sourced Features in Wisconsin English," *Journal of English Linguistics* 42, no. 4 (Dec. 2014): 284–306; Arika Okrent, "The Wisconsin Town that Didn't Learn English for Five Generations," *Mental Floss*, 2012, mentalfloss.com/article/13026/wisconsin-town-didnt-learn-english-five-generations.

8. Benjamin Frey, "Towards a General Theory of Language Shift: A Case Study in Wisconsin German and North Carolina Cherokee" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2013).

9. Carl Wittke, *German Americans and the World War* (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1936), 33–34.

10. Joseph Salmons, "Community, Region and Language Shift in German-speaking Wisconsin," in *Regionalism in the Age of Globalism: Concepts of Regionalism*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen, Marc Frey, James Peacock, and Niklaus Steiner (Madison, Wis.: Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures, 2005), 129–38; idem, "The Role of Community and Regional Structure in Language Shift," in *Regionalism in the Age of Globalism: Forms of Regionalism*, ed. Lothar Hönnighausen, Anke Ortlepp, James Peacock, Niklaus Steiner, and Carrie Matthews (Madison, Wis.: Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures, 2005), 133–44; Felecia A. Lucht, "Language Variation in a German-American Com-

munity: A Diachronic Study of the Spectrum of Language Use in Lebanon, Wisconsin” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2007); Benjamin Frey, “Towards a General Theory of Language Shift” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2013); Joshua R. Brown, “Religious Identity and Language Shift among Amish-Mennonites in Kishacoquillas Valley, Pennsylvania” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2011).

For another recent study of language shift in German communities include (though not in the verticalization framework discussed below), see G. Scott Seeger, “Socio-economic Influence on Low German in North-Central Kansas: From Immigrant Language Lost to Heritage Language Revived” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2007).

11. Roland L. Warren, *The Community in America*, third ed. (Chicago: Rand-McNally, 1978).

12. Salmons, “The Shift from German to English”; Salmons “Community, Region and Language Shift”; Salmons “The Role of Community and Regional Structure in Language Shift”; Lucht, “Language Variation in a German American Community”; Frey, “Towards a General Theory of Language Shift.”

13. On the Bennett Law, see discussions in William F. Thompson, ed., *The History of Wisconsin*, vols. 1–6, esp. vols. 3 and 4.

14. Salmons, “The Shift from German to English.”

15. Lucht, “Language variation in a German American community.”

16. Crawford, *At War with Diversity*.

17. Catherine Stafford, “Spanish in Wisconsin: Advantages of maintenance and prospects for sustained vitality,” *Wisconsin Talk: Linguistic Diversity in the Badger State*, ed. Thomas Purnell, Eric Raimy, and Joseph Salmons (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 127.

18. Izhak Epstein, *La pensée et la polyglossie: Essai psychologique et didactique* (Lausanne: Librairie Payot et Cie, 1915), 210.

19. Aneta Pavlenko, *The Bilingual Mind: And What It Tells Us about Language and Thought* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell-Wiley, 2013), 4.

20. See Ellen Bialystok, “The good, the bad, and the indifferent,” *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 2009): 3–11; Ellen Bialystok and Fergus I. M. Craik, “Cognitive and linguistic processing in the bilingual mind,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 19, no. 1 (Feb. 2010): 19–23.

21. See Christos Pliatsikas, Tom Johnstone, and Theodoros Marinis, “Grey Matter Volume in the Cerebellum is Related to Processing of Grammatical Rules in a Second Language: A Structural vBM Study,” *Cerebellum* 13, no. 1 (Feb. 2014): 55–63; Christos Pliatsikas, Elisavet Moschopoulou, and James Douglas Saddy, “The effects of Bilingualism on the White Matter Structure of the Brain,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* (forthcoming).

22. See esp. Frey, “Towards a General Theory of Language Shift”; Felecia Lucht, “Life after Language Death: The Effects of Community Change on the History and Future of German in Southeastern Wisconsin” (unpublished manuscript, Wayne State University).

23. Luanne Von Schneidemesser, “More German Loanwords from the Dictionary of American Regional English,” in *The German Language in America*, ed. Joseph Salmons (Madi-

son, Wis.: Max Kade Institute, 1993), 225–49; idem, “Words Used in Wisconsin,” in *Wisconsin Talk*, 68–81.

24. Von Schneidemesser, “More German Loanwords.”

25. Robert B. Howell, “German Immigration and the Development of Regional Variants of American English: Using Contact Theory to Discover Our Roots,” in *The German Language in America*, 196–99.

26. Alyson Sewell and Joseph Salmons, “How far-reaching are the effects of contact? Parasitic gapping in Wisconsin German and English,” in *Questioning Language Contact: Limits of Contact, Contact at its Limits*, ed. Robert Nicolai (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 217–51.

27. Polish, Dutch, and some kinds of Yiddish have similar devoicing, thus this is likely again not just a German sourced pronunciation.

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29. Sylvie Dubois and Barbara M. Horvath, “Let’s Tink about Dat: Interdental Fricatives in Cajun English,” *Language Variation and Change* 10, no. 3 (Oct. 1998): 245–61.

30. Ngramviewer is available at books.google.com/ngrams. For a related discussion, see Kathryn Remlinger, Luanne von Schneidemesser, and Joseph Salmons, “Revised Perceptions: Changing Dialect Awareness in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula,” *American Speech* 84, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 177–91.

31. Danielle Schuld and Joseph Salmons, “Hearing a New Accent: Changing Perceptions of Wisconsin English Over Time,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Dialect Society, Portland, Ore., Jan. 2015.

32. William Labov and Sharon Ash, “Understanding Birmingham,” in *Language Variety in the South Revisited*, ed. Cynthia Bernstein, Thomas Nunnally, and Robin Sabino (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 508–73; Paul Kerswill, “Koineization and Accommodation,” *Handbook of Language Variation and Change*, ed. J. K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill, and Natalie Schilling-Estes (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 669–702.

33. Steven H. Keiser, *Pennsylvania German in the American Midwest* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), 1.

34. Keiser, *Pennsylvania German in the American Midwest*, 24, 3; Steven M. Nolt, *A History of the Amish*, rev. ed. (Intercourse, Pa.: Good Books, 2003), 337.

35. Reuben Epp, *The Spelling of Low German and Plautdietsch: Towards an Official Plautdietsch Orthography* (Hillsboro, Kan.: Reader’s Press, 1996); Jack Thiessen, *Mennonite Low German Dictionary / Mennonitsch-Plattdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Madison, Wis.: Max Kade Institute, 2003).

36. Paula M. Rowden, Angelia M. Paschal, Suzanne R. Hawley, and Tracy Hsaio. “Oral Health Attitudes and Practices among a German Mexican Mennonite Farmworker Community,” *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 13, no. 6 (Dec. 2011): 1159–67.

37. Martha Ratliff, *Hmong-Mien Language History* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 2010); Susan Burt, "Hmong in Wisconsin," in *Wisconsin Talk*, 111. On Spanish, see Stafford, "Spanish in Wisconsin," 128.

38. Brent O. Peterson, "Germanistik and Ethnicity," in *Challenges of Germanistik: Traditions and prospects of an academic discipline/Germanistik weltweit? Zur Theorie und Praxis des Disziplinrahmens*, ed. Eitel Timm (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 1992), 29–47; Joseph Salmons, "Academic/Non-Academic Relations and Filiopietism in German American Studies," *Monatshefte* 86, no. 3 (Fall 1994): 374–77; Robert W. Frizzell, "German American History as Written Decades Ago," review of Don Heinrich Tolzmann, *The German American Experience, H-Ethnic: H-Net Reviews*, Dec. 2003, h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=8550.

39. Frizzell, "German American History as Written Decades Ago."

40. See Frederick C. Luebke, *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974); Jörg Nagler, "Pandora's Box: Propaganda and War Hysteria in the United States during World War I," in *Great War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 485–500.

41. For more on Kloss's work for the Foreign Institute (*das Deutsche Ausland-Institut*), see Katja Gesche, *Kultur als Instrument der Außenpolitik totalitärer Staaten: Das Deutsche Ausland-Institut 1933–1945* (Köln: Böhlau, 2006).

42. Cornelia Wilhelm, "Nazi Propaganda and the Uses of the Past: Heinz Kloss and the Making of a "German America," *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 47, no. 1 (2002): 82.

43. Wilhelm, "Nazi Propaganda," 59.

44. See Wilkerson and Salmons, "Good Old Immigrants"; idem, "Linguistic Marginalities."

45. Wilhelm, "Nazi Propaganda."