

Bidialectalism in Intense Language Variety Contact: An “Unexpected” Development in the Death of Pennsylvania Dutchified English

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ABSTRACT: Pennsylvania Dutchified English (PDE), a dialect spoken in south central Pennsylvania, is in its last stages as a viable variety of American English. The result of centuries of contact between speakers of several English varieties and Pennsylvania German, the dialect has ceased to be transmitted from generation to generation, and it will undoubtedly die out completely within the next 40-50 years. As PDE is approaching extinction, however, a certain “unexpected” class of speakers has emerged: bidialectals who are fully capable of maintaining and skillfully wielding two distinct systems of linguistic features and language variation patterns, corresponding to PDE and to the regional standard of English, respectively. Such speakers have been assumed by Hazen (2006) to be non-existent, even logically impossible, but this study presents convincing evidence to the contrary. This presentation will begin with an overview of PDE in terms of its development, its hallmark linguistic features, and its shifting sociolinguistic context. The remainder of the talk will focus on one particularly interesting and salient feature of PDE (in terms of “salience” set forth by Trudgill (1986) and Auer et. al (1998)): obstruent devoicing. This feature is already noteworthy because it shows evidence of interplay for PDE speakers of norms of both German obstruent devoicing and American English aspiration. It will also serve as an excellent device in this talk to illustrate the particulars of the loss of linguistic features over generations of PDE speakers, as well as the driving forces behind the “unraveling” of PDE among its last generation of speakers.

The final section of the presentation will focus on one representative bidialectal speaker of PDE and the Pennsylvania regional standard. Obstruent devoicing is also quite illustrative in her case as well. A brief ethnographic analysis of her motivations for maintaining and using two distinct dialects reveals that the need to move competently in two worlds whose expectations and demands are often at odds with each other drives bidialectalism in contexts of intense language variety contact. The development of a general profile of such speakers is absolutely critical to further research in bidialectalism as well as to the construction of more complete models of language variety shift and

obsolescence.