



Language Patterns among Pennsylvania Anabaptists

Do the Amish and Old Order
Mennonites use English and
Pennsylvania Dutch differently?

Rose Fisher

Kreider Lecture
April 2, 2024



**THE YOUNG CENTER
FOR ANABAPTIST AND
PIETIST STUDIES**

ELIZABETHTOWN COLLEGE



PennState



Roadmap

1. My background
2. What is linguistics?
3. Pennsylvania Dutch (PD)
4. What is grammatical gender?
5. My dissertation project
 1. Articles (*a, an, the*)
 2. Adjectives (*big, small*)
 3. Pronouns (*he, she, it*)

My Background

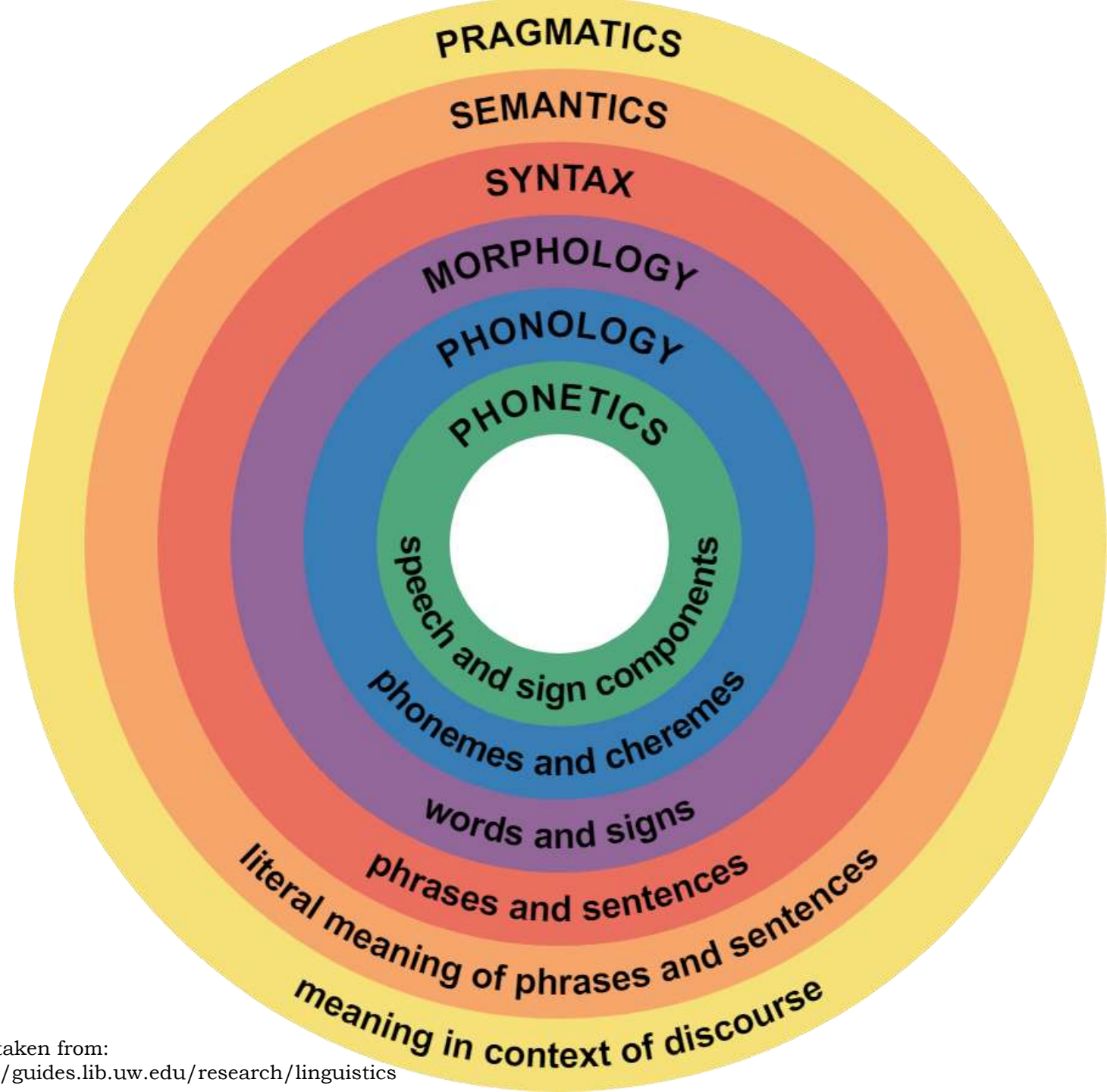
- I was born in Lancaster County into an Amish family
- My parents left the Amish in 2007 when I was 11
- I am a native PD speaker



What is linguistics?

The study of language structure


- The rules that allow for meaning to be communicated





Why does linguistics matter?

1. Understanding language is crucial for understanding what makes humans different than animals
2. Understanding language tells us much about how our brains work
3. Understanding language is just one demonstration of how fearfully and wonderfully made we are! (see Psalm 139:14)
4. If we have a better understanding of how language works, we can do a better job of appreciating and maintaining the languages we have



An example of Phonetics from English

Vowels

Linguists don't care too much about orthography (how things are spelled). We care about the sounds people actually make.

How many vowels do you think English has?

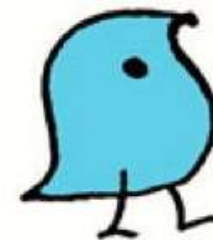
- American English has about 15 vowels
- We can use the IPA (international phonetic alphabet) to write out the sounds that people actually say
- though [θoʊ]
- through [θruː]
- thought [θɔːt]
- thorough [θʌr.ə]
- tough [tʌf]
- cough [kɔːf]

An example of Morphology from English

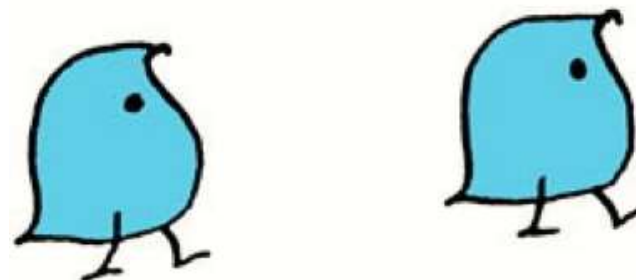
Plurals

Plural -s has 3 realizations in English ->
[-s] (cats), [-z] (dogs), and [-iz] (horses)

*Just because a grammar rule isn't written down in a textbook of English doesn't mean it isn't a grammar rule that speakers follow.



What about Gutch?



Now there is another one.

There are two of them.

There are two ____.[©]

Photo courtesy of Jean Berko Gleason

This example is inspired by Frances Blanchette's work. The grammar of double negatives is more complicated than what is presented here.

An example of Syntax from English

Double Negatives

When linguists talk about grammar, they mean rules that speakers actually use like this one. Grammar goes far beyond what is considered “correct”.

1. He don't eat no cake.

2. He never doesn't eat cake.

Both statements are double negatives. Do they have a positive or negative reading?

What is the rule?

Grammar rule:

n't first = negative

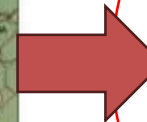
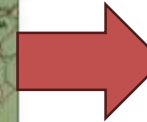
n't second = positive

Pennsylvania Dutch

Where did it come from?

Anabaptist Migration

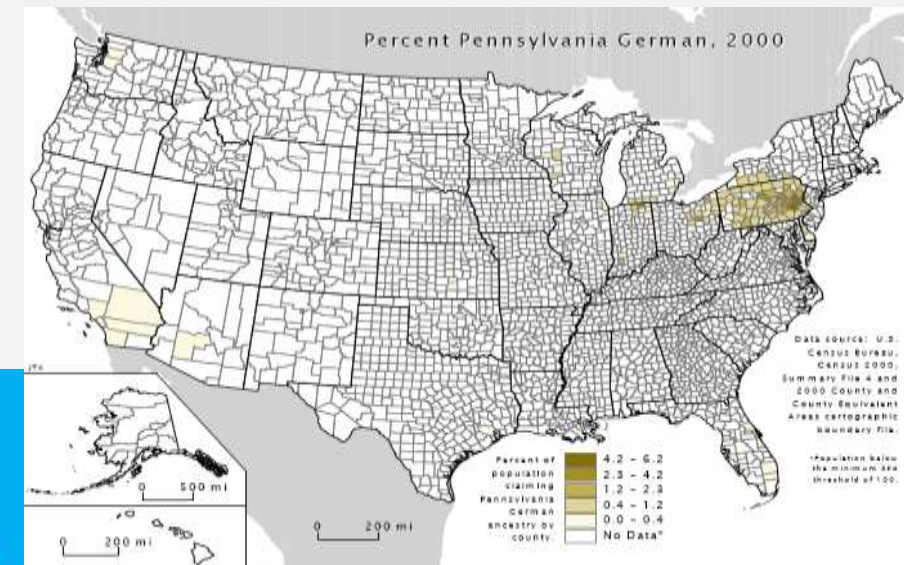
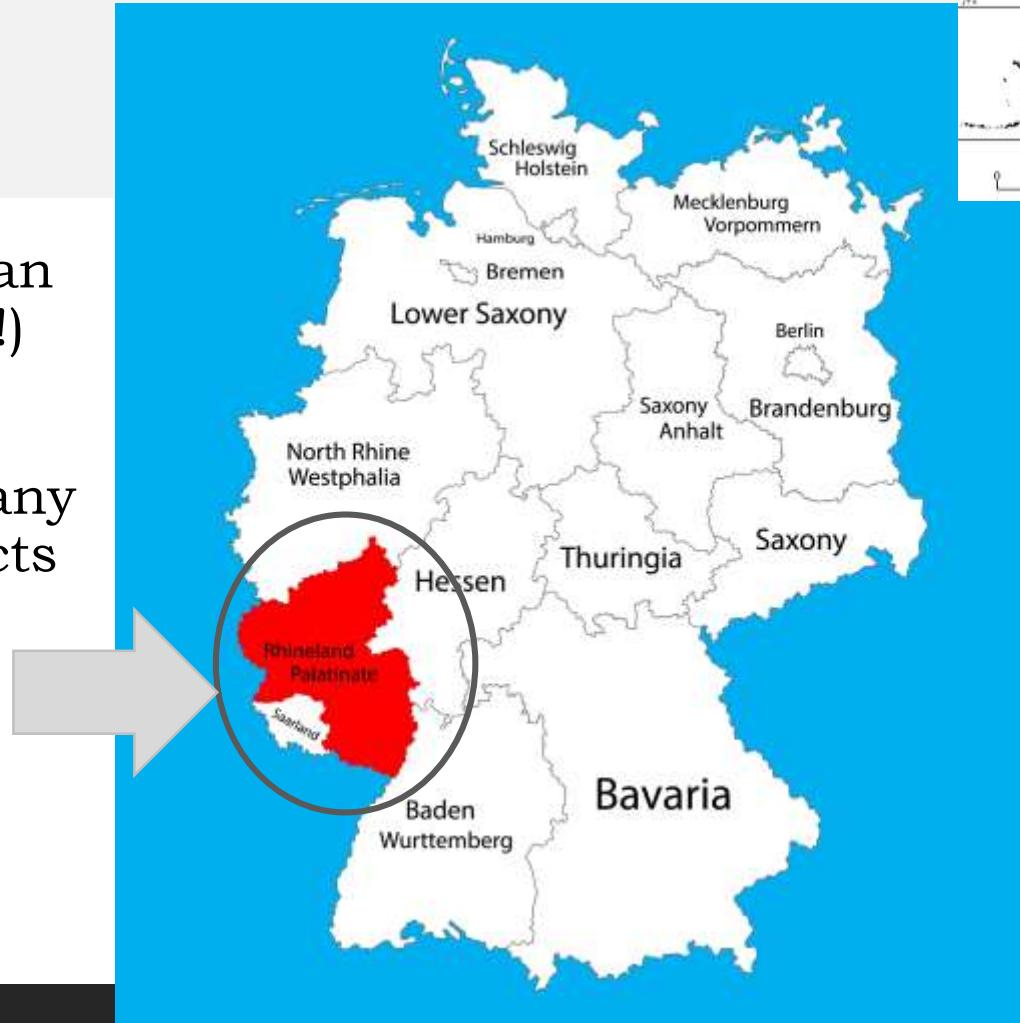
- The focal points of the Anabaptist movement throughout the 15- and 1600s were Switzerland and the Netherlands
- Those who became the Pennsylvania Dutch speakers came primarily from Switzerland and moved North into Germany (the Palatinate) and west into France (Alsace)
- From Alsace and the Palatinate, Amish and Mennonites and many others who became the Pennsylvania Dutch speakers moved to Pennsylvania
 - Later, Anabaptists spread throughout the Midwest and elsewhere



*Parts of this slide are borrowed from Josh Brown and Kraybill et al. (2013)

The European Roots of Pennsylvania Dutch

- Closely related to German (not Netherlands Dutch!)
- Has similarities with many southern German dialects like Swiss and Alsatian, but it most closely resembles Palatine German



- Formed in Pennsylvania in the 1700's
- Has its own group- and region-based dialects

Who speaks / spoke Pennsylvania Dutch

- German Reformed and Lutheran immigrants
 - Historically, this group made up the vast majority of Pennsylvania Dutch speakers
 - The Anabaptists accounted for only about 5% of the original immigrants (Louden 2016:50)
 - This group (with a few exceptions) no longer uses PD for daily communication
- Anabaptists (Amish and Mennonite groups and a few others)
 - Many of the less conservative Anabaptists also no longer speak it
 - The more conservative Anabaptist groups now make up the vast majority of modern Pennsylvania Dutch speakers

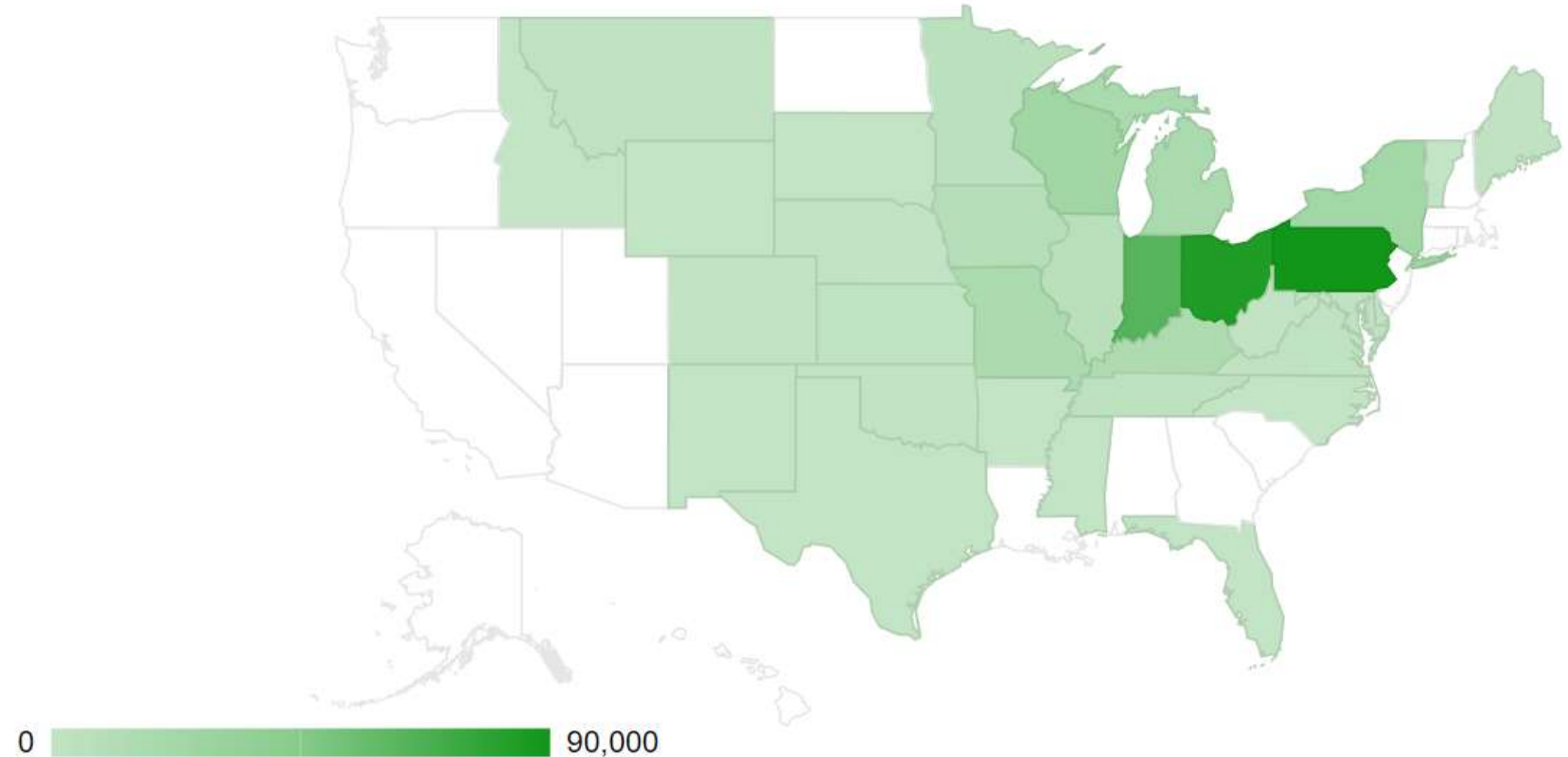
Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking Population

Amish

- USA: 378,190
- Canada: 6,100
- South America: 90

Mennonites

- USA: 34,347
- Canada: 7,723



- Over 400,000 Speakers in total

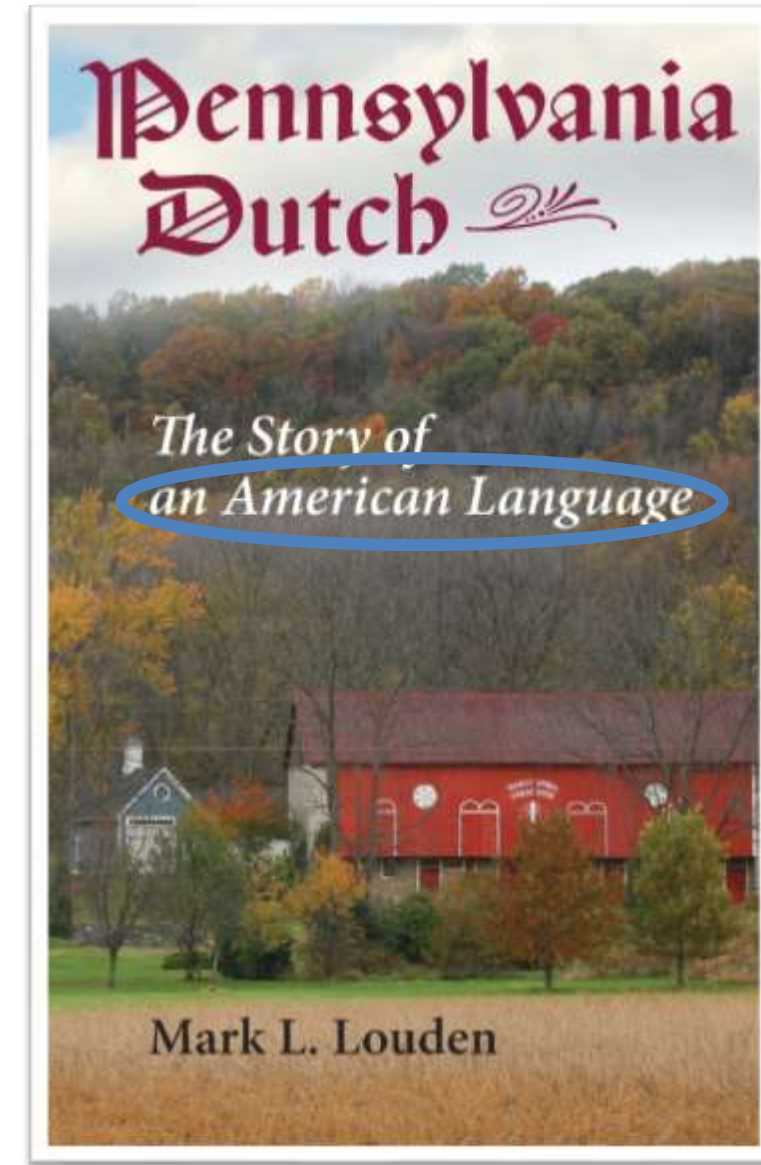
Young Center statistics for 2023

Language or dialect?

- There aren't really official criteria for the difference between a language and a dialect
- Like Mark Loudon, I prefer to call it a language
 - The context is American not European for the entire history of PD (over 300 years)
 - It is NOT mutually intelligible with many (all?) other German dialects
 - Pennsylvania Dutch has (mutually intelligible) dialects of its own




This movie portrays this “Amish” character communicating with ease in Berlin. Extremely unrealistic!



Why does Pennsylvania Dutch matter? Isn't it just some broken mishmash of German and English?

- Pennsylvania Dutch is fascinating precisely because it has so successfully resisted the influence of English and maintained so much of its Germanness
- It is a complete language that has its own set of grammatical rules (for sound combinations, word building, and word order)
 - It doesn't matter that these rules are not necessarily all written down or explicitly taught
 - It doesn't matter that most modern speakers do not write in it
 - Even to speak to each another, we have to follow rules, or we would only produce gibberish
- It is true that English has had a profound influence on PD
 - PD has also greatly influenced the English spoken in areas where PD is also spoken
 - Languages that come into contact with each other will inevitably influence each other. This is not new or surprising, it happens all over the world, and it does not mean that those languages become less complete.



An example of Morphology from Pennsylvania Dutch

Borrowed verbs

It's no secret that modern PD borrows a lot of words from English. What happens when it borrows verbs like “to teach” or “to avoid”?

- *Ich gleich teache!* “I like to teach!”
- *Sie sett sell avoide.* “She should avoid that.”

What is the grammar rule?

- Pennsylvania Dutch verbs in their base form (*to teach* in English) have to have this –e sound at the end
- Even when a word is borrowed from English it has to obey Pennsylvania Dutch grammar rules

Grammatical Gender

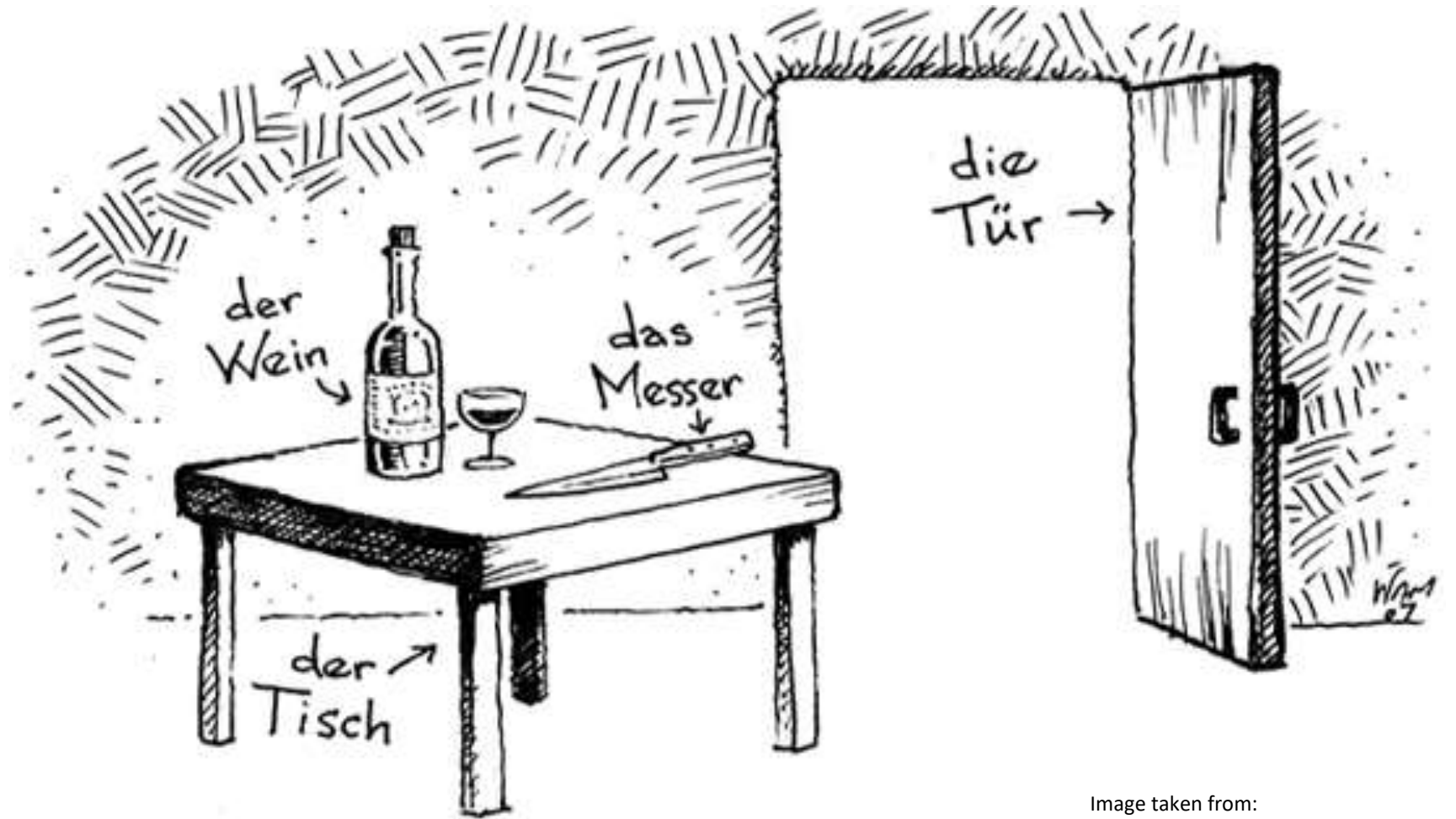


Image taken from:
https://coerll.utexas.edu/gg/gr/no_02.html

Grammatical gender is a way that some languages use to categorize nouns. It is related to but not the same thing as biological sex or natural gender.



Why does grammatical gender matter?

1. It is a complicated part of grammar that German has but English does not
2. It can help us better understand the influence of English on Pennsylvania Dutch
3. It can also help us better understand the limits of those influences from English
4. It is very difficult for people to learn. Why do any languages have it at all?
5. Since a lot of languages closely related to German/PD have lost or reduced their gender system (like English!), we can see that this type of change is typical across languages (see Lohndal & Westergaard 2016)

Research Questions

1. To what extent do Amish and Mennonite speakers use grammatical gender the way it historically was used in PD?
2. Are there generational differences?
 - 3 generations: 18-40, 41-60, 60 and older
3. What can we learn about the influence of English on Pennsylvania Dutch by studying what is going on with grammatical gender?

Amish and Mennonite Pennsylvania Dutch

- Many similarities!
 - Both speak English and PD well (proficient bilinguals)
 - Both use English and PD in well-defined domains (Louden 1988:120)
 - For example, PD at home and English at work or with outsiders
 - Both usually learn PD first and then English sometime around school age
 - Both use High German texts for church services, Bible reading, etc.
- There are also some differences
 - The Old Order Mennonites have been more successful than the Amish (of Lancaster) at keeping English out of their homes and communities
 - Their language domains are more strictly defined than the Amish
 - speak only PD amongst themselves

*The car-driving Weaverland Conference Mennonites use mostly English



Amish



Mennonites

My predictions


1. Both the Old Order Mennonites and Amish of Lancaster use grammatical gender in a way that does not perfectly conform to the historical system because this kind of change is common
2. Because Amish PD speakers have more intense contact with English, the Amish are further away from the historical system than the Mennonites

My Dissertation Study

- Language Background Questionnaire
- Production
 - 96 phrases translated from English to PD

- 32 adjective-noun pairs
- 8 for each gender and 8 for plural

- Judgments
 - Definite articles (*der/die/es* - *the*)
 - Adjective endings (*gleener*, *gleeni*)
 - Pronouns (*er-he/sie-she/es-it*)
- Production can be compared with judgments
- All responses are compared with what grammar books say about PD to see what may be changing



	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Humans	stubborn man	young child	nice woman	friendly people
Humans	cute brother	happy baby	bossy sister	well-behaved children
Large Animals	brown dog	hungry sheep	mad cat	dumb horses
Small Animals	pink worm	gray mouse	loud fly	thin spiders
Objects	big tree	wet leaf	yellow flower	good peaches
Objects	gross foot	broken leg	fat hand	white teeth
Objects	dirty plate	hard bed	greasy fork	small spoons
Objects	handy mirror	thick book	baked potato	comfortable chairs

Participants

- 31 total (and counting!)
 - Average Age: ~50 years old (range: 22-90)
 - 18 Females, 13 Males
- 17 Old Order Amish:
 - 16 from Lancaster and 1 from Perry County
- 14 Old Order Mennonites
 - 6 from Lancaster County
 - 5 from Berks County
 - 3 from Union County
- 2 Weaverland Conference Mennonites from Lancaster (Horning Mennonites)
- The rest are Groffdale Conference (Joe Wenger Mennonites)

Language Background Questionnaire

- Conducted in Pennsylvania Dutch
- Aims to:
 - Get basic biographical info (age, sex, location)
 - Understand language use
 - Frequency of use
 - Dominance of PD vs. English
 - Domains (in the home vs. at work)

Wo warscht du gebore? (zip code)

Wo wuhscht du nau? (zip code)

Was dusch du schaffe?

Hascht du English adder Deitsch serscht gelannt? Adder all zwee? Wann hascht du die zwett Language gelannt?

Was henn dir geschwetz deheem wann du glee warscht?

- ☐ Yusch English
☐ All zwee (meh English)
☐ All zwee (baut der Same)
☐ All zwee (meh Deitsch)
☐ Yusch Deitsch

Was hascht du als geschwetz an die Schul?

- ☐ Yusch English
☐ All zwee (meh English)
☐ All zwee (baut der Same)
☐ All zwee (meh Deitsch)
☐ Yusch Deitsch

Was hascht du als geschwetz an die Gmee?

- ☐ Yusch English
☐ All zwee (meh English)
☐ All zwee (baut der Same)
☐ All zwee (meh Deitsch)
☐ Yusch Deitsch

Was hascht du als geschwetz mit dei Buddies?

- ☐ Yusch English
☐ All zwee (meh English)
☐ All zwee (baut der Same)
☐ All zwee (meh Deitsch)
☐ Yusch Deitsch

Definite Article Judgment Task

Can the participants choose the correct gendered article (*the*) for each noun?

Definite Articles

- The word *the* in English
- **Masculine** – **der**
- **Neuter** – **es**
- **Feminine** and **plural** – **die**

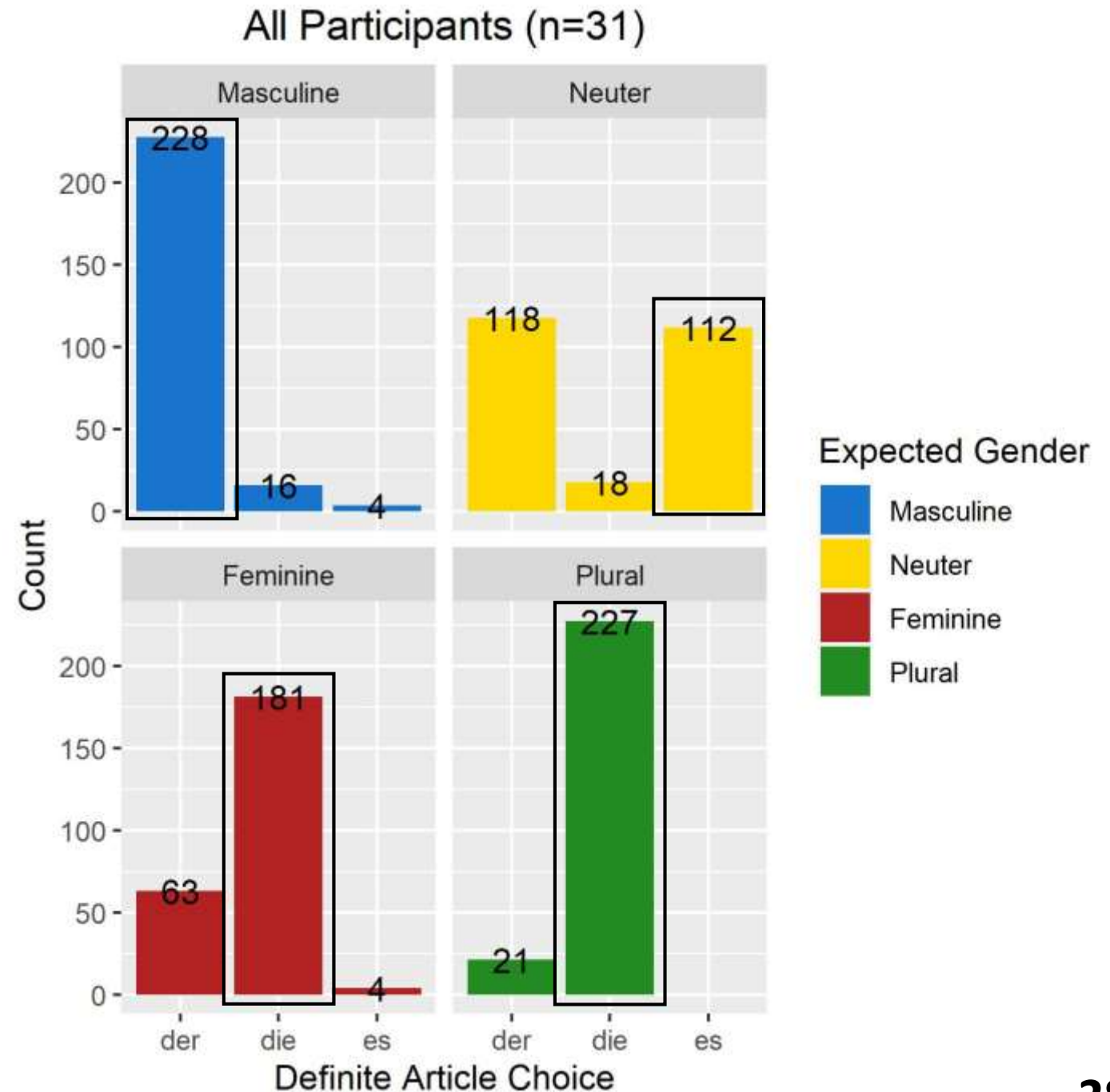


- 32 nouns
- 8 per gender and 8 plural
- Participants stated whether they would use *der*, *die*, or *es* for each of the 32 nouns

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Humans	Mann 'man'	Kind 'child'	Fraa 'woman'	Leit 'people'
Humans	Bruder 'brother'	Bebi 'baby'	Schweschder 'sister'	Kinner 'children'
Large Animals	Hund 'dog'	Schippi 'sheep'	Katz 'cat'	Geil 'horse'
Small Animals	Warm 'worm'	Meisli 'mouse'	Mick 'fly'	Schpinne 'spiders'
Objects	Baam 'tree'	Laab 'leaf'	Blumm 'flower'	Pasching 'peaches'
Objects	Fuuss 'foot'	Bee 'leg'	Hand 'hand'	Zaeh 'teeth'
Objects	Deller 'plate'	Bett 'bed'	Gawwel 'fork'	Lefflin 'spoons'
Objects	Schpiggel 'mirror'	Buch 'book'	Grumbeer 'potato'	Schtiehl 'chairs'

Definite Articles

- The word *the* in English
 - **Masculine** – **der**
 - **Neuter** – **es**
 - **Feminine** and **plural** – **die**
-
- Masculine and plural are very strong
 - Feminine is doing pretty well
 - Around half of the neuter nouns were attached to the masculine definite article *der*



- The word *the* in English

- **Masculine** – **der**
- **Neuter** – **es**
- **Feminine** and **plural** – **die**

Definite Articles

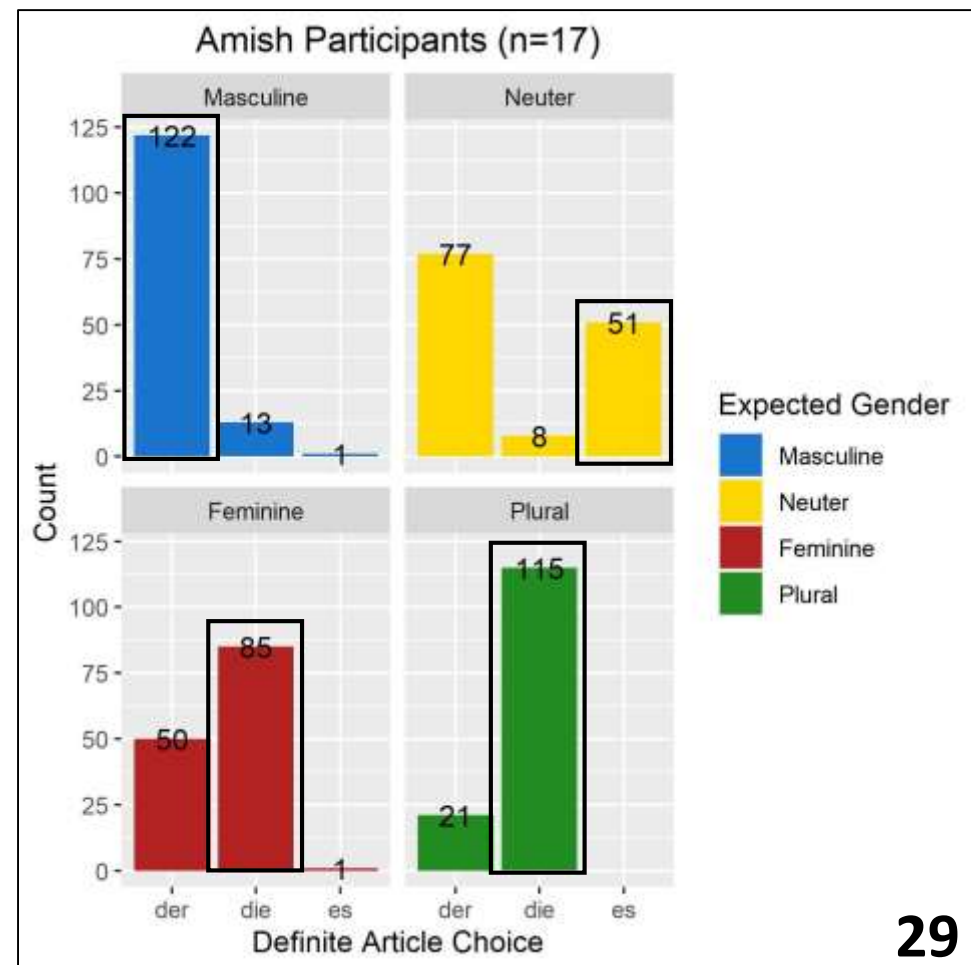
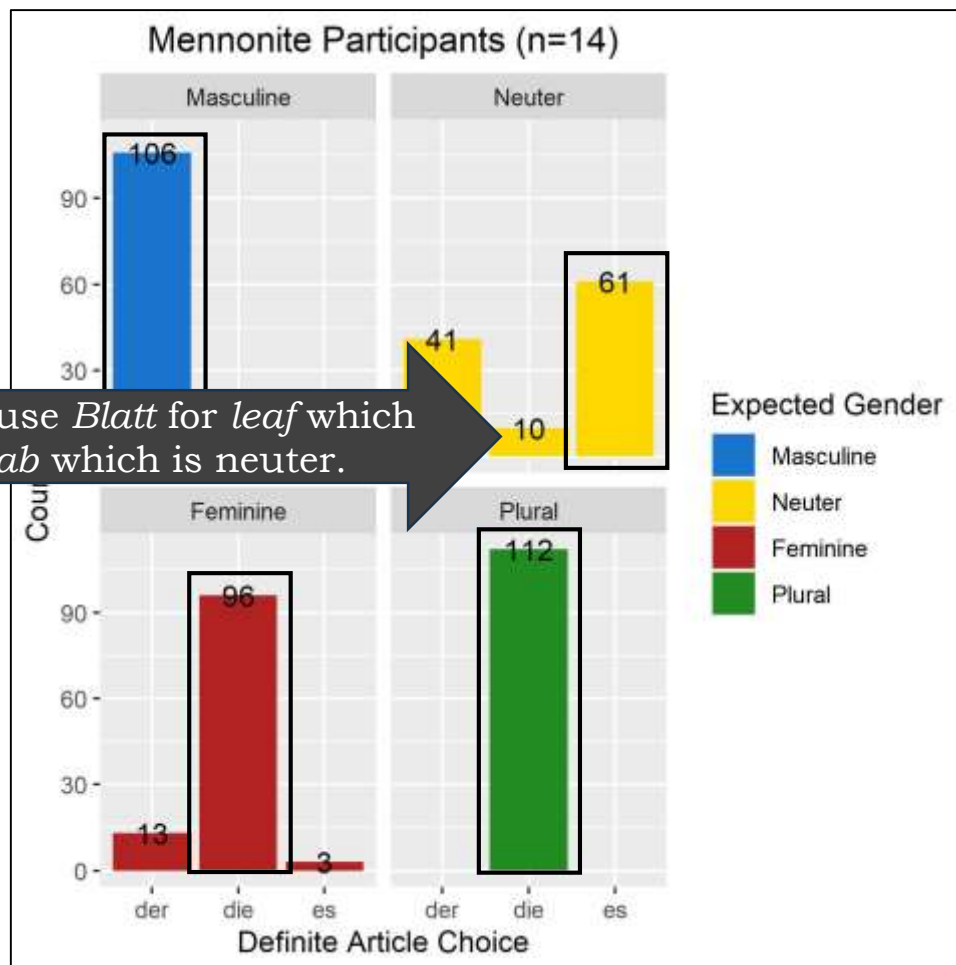
Mennonites:

- pretty likely to choose the historically correct article
- *der* is being used instead of *es*

The Mennonite participants use *Blatt* for *leaf* which is feminine instead of *Laab* which is neuter.

Amish:

- Less historically correct choice of article
- *Der* is taking over the space of both *es* and *die*



Adjective Ending Judgment Task

Can the participants choose the correct gendered adjective ending for each noun?

Adjective Endings

(in phrases that begin with *a/an*)

- The endings that get attached to adjectives

- Masculine** -er
- Neuter** -ø
- Feminine** -i
- Plural** -i

- 16 nouns
- 4 per gender and 4 plural

- Participants stated whether they would use **-er**, **-i**, or **no ending**



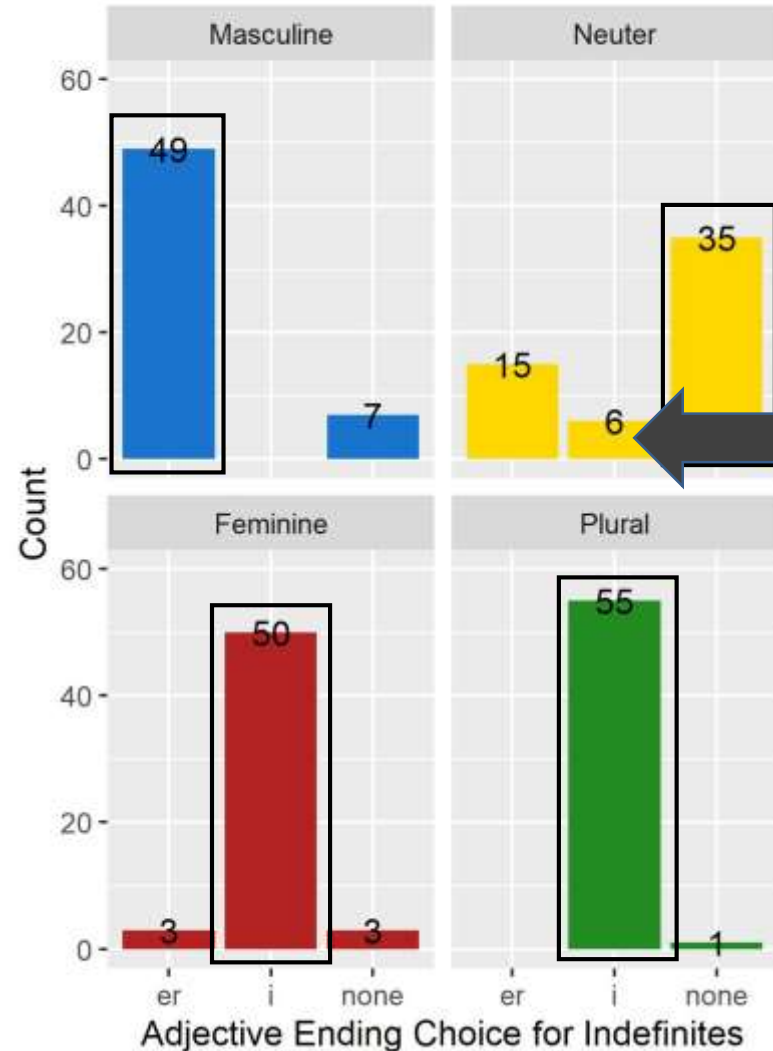
- En dickkeppicher Mann, en dickkeppich*i* Mann, en dickkeppich Mann
- En yunger Kind, en yung*i* Kind, en yung Kind
- En scheener Fraa, en scheen*i* Fraa, en schee Fraa
- Freindlicher Leit, freindlich*i* Leit, freindlich Leit

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Humans	dickkeppich- Mann 'stubborn man'	yung Kind 'young child'	schee(n)- Fraa 'nice woman'	freindlich- Leit 'friendly people'
Large Animals	brau(n)- Hund 'brown dog'	hungrich Schippi 'hungry sheep'	bees- Katz 'mad cat'	dumm- Geil 'dumb horse'
Objects	gross- Baam 'big tree'	nass- Laab 'wet leaf'	gehl- Blumm 'yellow flower'	gut- Pasching 'good peaches'
Objects	hendich- Schpiggel 'handy mirror'	hatt- Bett 'hard bed'	schmutzich- Gawwel 'greasy fork'	glee(n)- Lefflin 'little spoons'

Adjective Endings

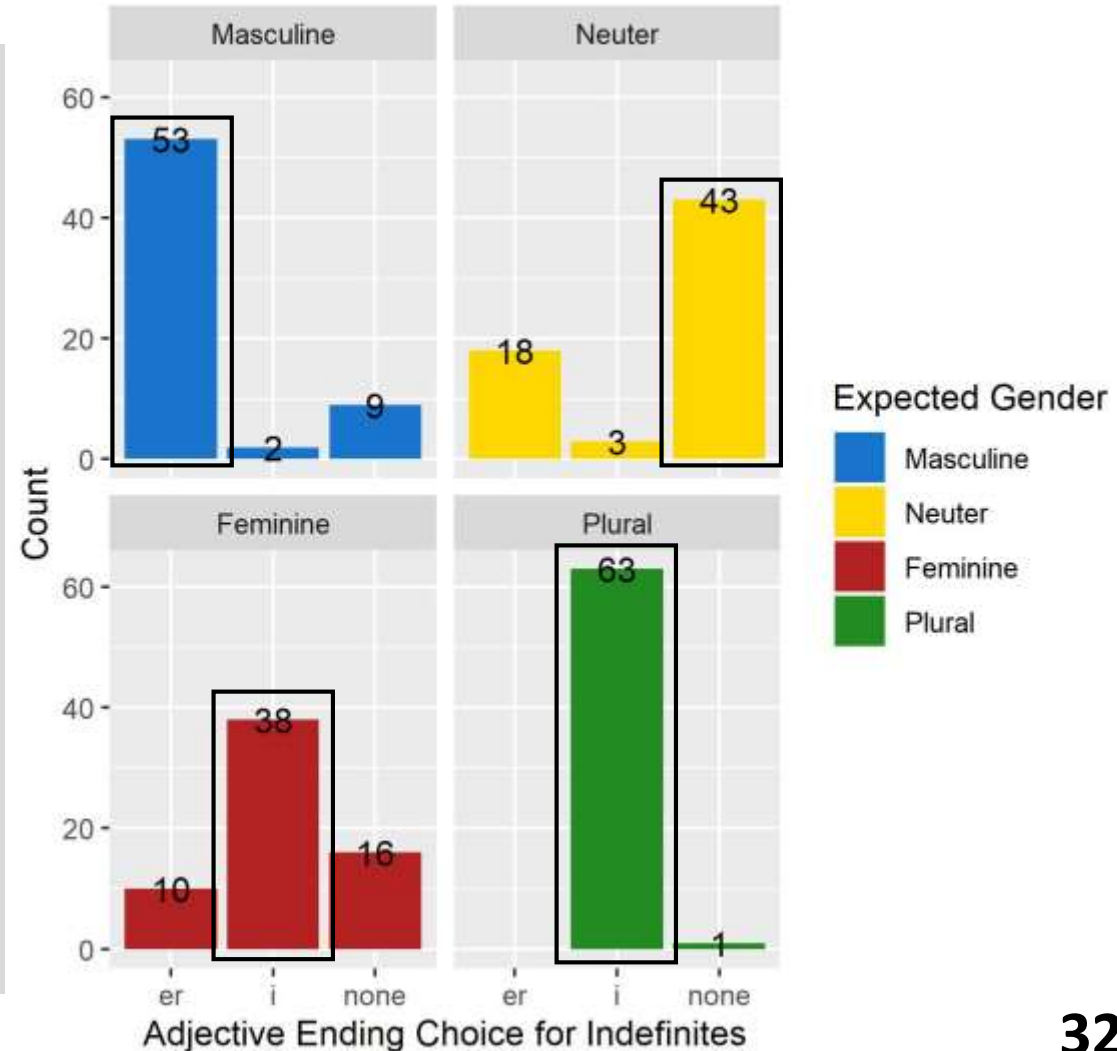
(in phrases that begin with *a/an*)

14 Mennonite Participants (224 Judgments)



- The Mennonite participants were again pretty close to the historical gender use
- Again *-i* in Neuter was because of *die Blatt* (instead of *es Laab*)
- The Amish participants were again less close
- In neuter and feminine especially, they did not closely follow historical gender

16 Amish Participants (256 Judgments)



Adjective Endings

(in phrases that begin with *the*)

- The endings that get attached to adjectives

- Masculine** -∅
- Neuter** -∅
- Feminine** -∅
- Plural** -i

- Participants stated whether they would use *-er*, *-i*, or no ending



1. Der dickeppicher Mann, der dickeppichi Mann, der dickeppich Mann

2. Es yunger Kind, es yungi Kind, es yung Kind

3. Die scheener Fraa, die scheeni Fraa, die schee Fraa

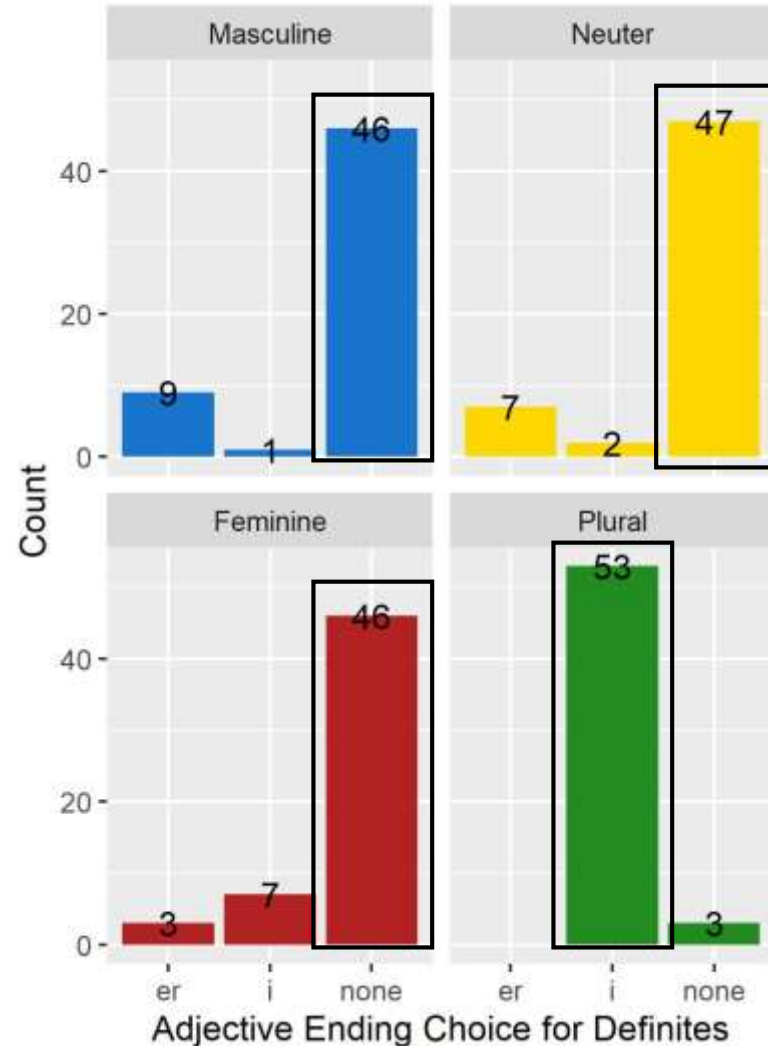
4. Die freindlicher Leit, die freindlich*i* Leit, die freindlich Leit

	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Humans	dickeppich- Mann 'stubborn man'	yung Kind 'young child'	schee(n)- Fraa 'nice woman'	freindlich- Leit 'friendly people'
Large Animals	brau(n)- Hund 'brown dog'	hungrich Schippi 'hungry sheep'	bees- Katz 'mad cat'	dumm- Geil 'dumb horse'
Objects	gross- Baam 'big tree'	nass- Laab 'wet leaf'	gehl- Blumm 'yellow flower'	gut- Pasching 'good peaches'
Objects	hendich- Schpiggel 'handy mirror'	hatt- Bett 'hard bed'	schmutzich- Gawwel 'greasy fork'	glee(n)- Lefflin 'little spoons'

Adjective Endings

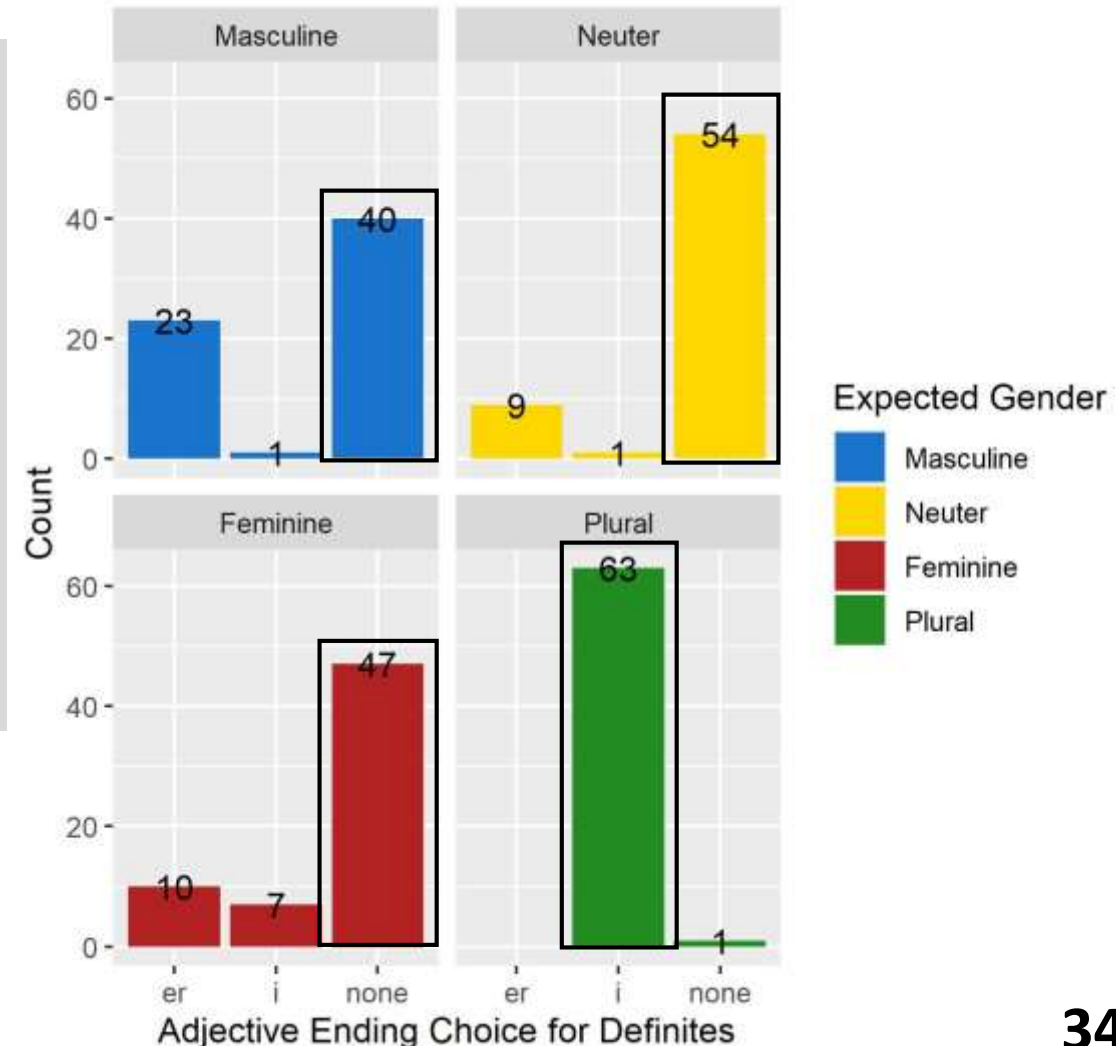
(in phrases that begin with *the*)

14 Mennonite Participants (224 Judgments)



- The Mennonite participants were again pretty close to the historical gender use
- The Amish participants were again less close
- They overused *-er* for masculine, feminine, and neuter

16 Amish Participants (256 Judgments)




Production (Translation)

Do the participants produce gender marking on articles and adjectives according to the historical system?

Production

96 phrases translated from English to PD

- 32 adjective-noun pairs
- 8 for each gender and 8 for plural
- Paired with *a/an*, *the*, *this*, and *that*



	Masculine	Neuter	Feminine	Plural
Humans	stubborn man	young child	nice woman	friendly people
Humans	cute brother	happy baby	bossy sister	well-behaved children
Large Animals	brown dog	hungry sheep	mad cat	dumb horses
Small Animals	pink worm	gray mouse	loud fly	thin spiders
Objects	big tree	wet leaf	yellow flower	good peaches
Objects	gross foot	broken leg	fat hand	white teeth
Objects	dirty plate	hard bed	greasy fork	small spoons
Objects	handy mirror	thick book	baked potato	comfortable chairs

Articles: Productions vs. Judgments

- The Mennonites' productions were pretty target-like across all age groups
- For the Amish, especially younger speakers strayed more from marking gender according to the historical system
- They still did follow the system a lot of the time though!

	Amish			Mennonites		
Judgment	P01 (male 60 years or older)	P12 (female between 40-60)	P11 (male between 18-39)	P05 (male 60 years or older)	P07 (female between 40-60)	P04 (female between 18-39)
Target-likeness	94%	53%	28%	97%	81%	91%

	Amish			Mennonites		
Production	P01 (male 60 years or older)	P12 (female between 41-60)	P11 (male between 18-40)	P05 (male 60 years or older)	P07 (female between 41-60)	P04 (female between 18-40)
Expected	49	50	56	89	76	74
Unexpected	5	31	24	2	9	4
Target-likeness	91%	62%	70%	98%	89%	95%

Adjectives: Productions vs. Judgments

- The Mennonites' productions were pretty target-like across all age groups
- For the Amish, especially younger speakers strayed more from marking gender according to the historical system
- They still did follow the system a lot of the time though!

	Amish			Mennonites		
Judgment	P01 (male 60 years or older)	P12 (female between 40-60)	P11 (male between 18-39)	P05 (male 60 years or older)	P07 (female between 40-60)	P04 (female between 18-39)
Target-likeness	97%	59%	81%	94%	97%	97%

	Amish			Mennonites		
Production	P01 (male 60 years or older)	P12 (female between 40-60)	P11 (male between 18-39)	P05 (male 60 years or older)	P07 (female between 40-60)	P04 (female between 18-39)
Expected	62	46	52	100	89	82
Incongruent	0	28	17	2	1	0
Overmarking	0	8	18	1	5	1
Undermarking	2	4	4	0	1	0
Target-likeness	97%	53%	57%	97%	93%	99%

Pronoun Rating Task

Do the participants prefer the pronoun that matches grammatical or natural gender?

Was iss **es Kind** n duh? –
‘What is the child doing?’

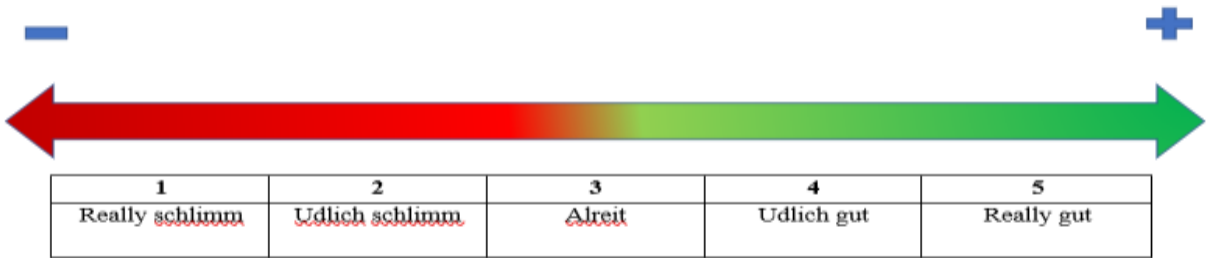


Sie iss n heile. –
‘She is crying.’

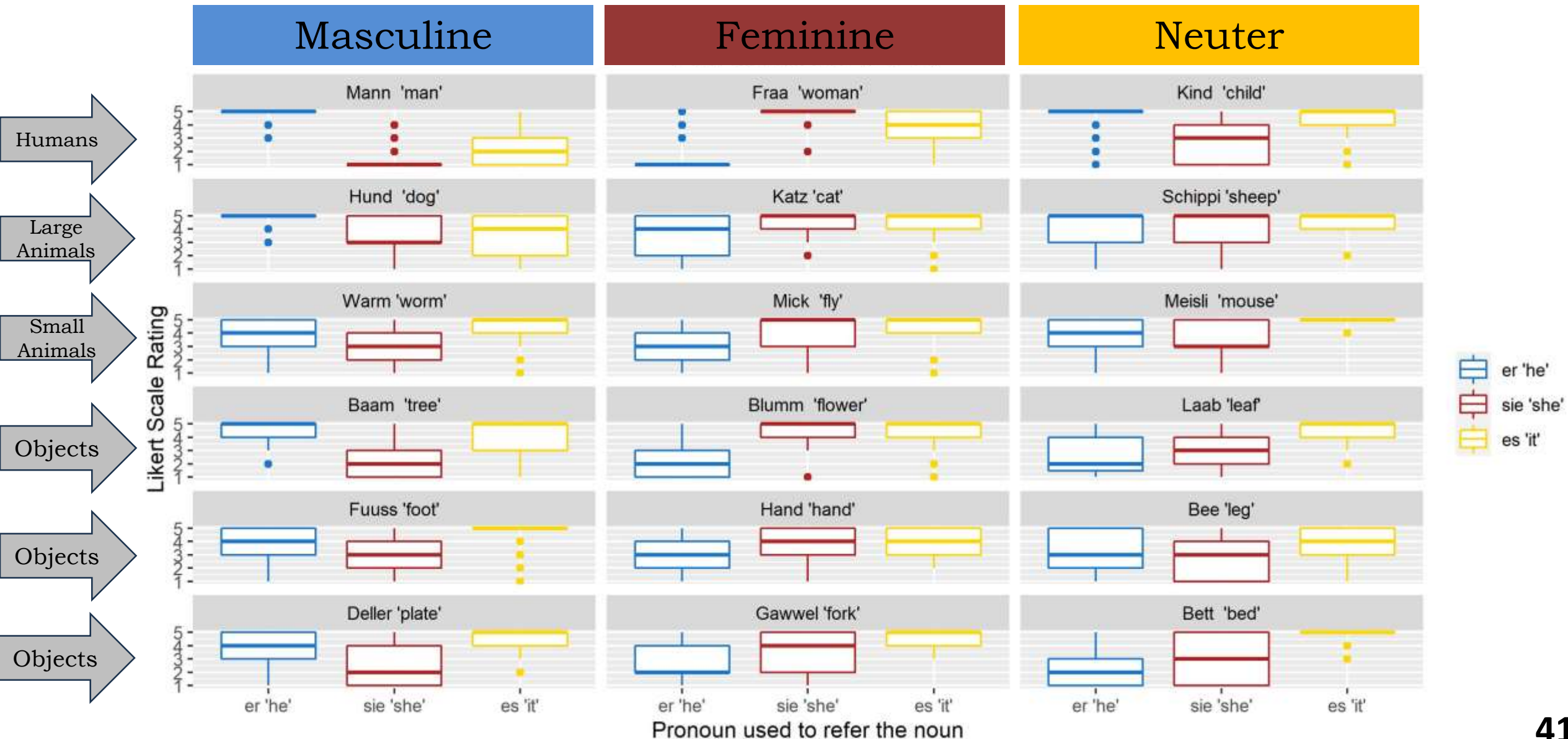
- 18 Nouns
 - 6 each for **Masculine**, **Feminine**, and **Neuter**
- Each noun was referred to by each gendered pronoun
 - **er** – **M**, **sie** – **F**, and **es** – **N**
- For the total 54, the participants had to decide how well the pronoun fit into the scenario on a scale of 1 (bad) - 5 (good)

	Masculine	Feminine	Neuter
Humans	Mann ‘man’	Fraa ‘woman’	Kind ‘child’
Large Animals	Hund ‘dog’	Katz ‘cat’	Schippi ‘sheep’
Small Animals	Warm ‘worm’	Mick ‘fly’	Meisli ‘mouse’
Objects	Baam ‘tree’	Blumm ‘flower’	Laab ‘leaf’
Objects	Fuuss ‘foot’	Hand ‘hand’	Bee ‘leg’
Objects	Deller ‘plate’	Gawwel ‘fork’	Bett ‘bed’

Wie gut laats?



Pronoun Ratings for All Participants (n=29)



Pronoun Ratings: Mennonites vs. Amish

Humans:

- Mennonites and Amish pretty much the same
 - *He* is best for *man*, *she* for *woman*, and *he* or *it* for *child*

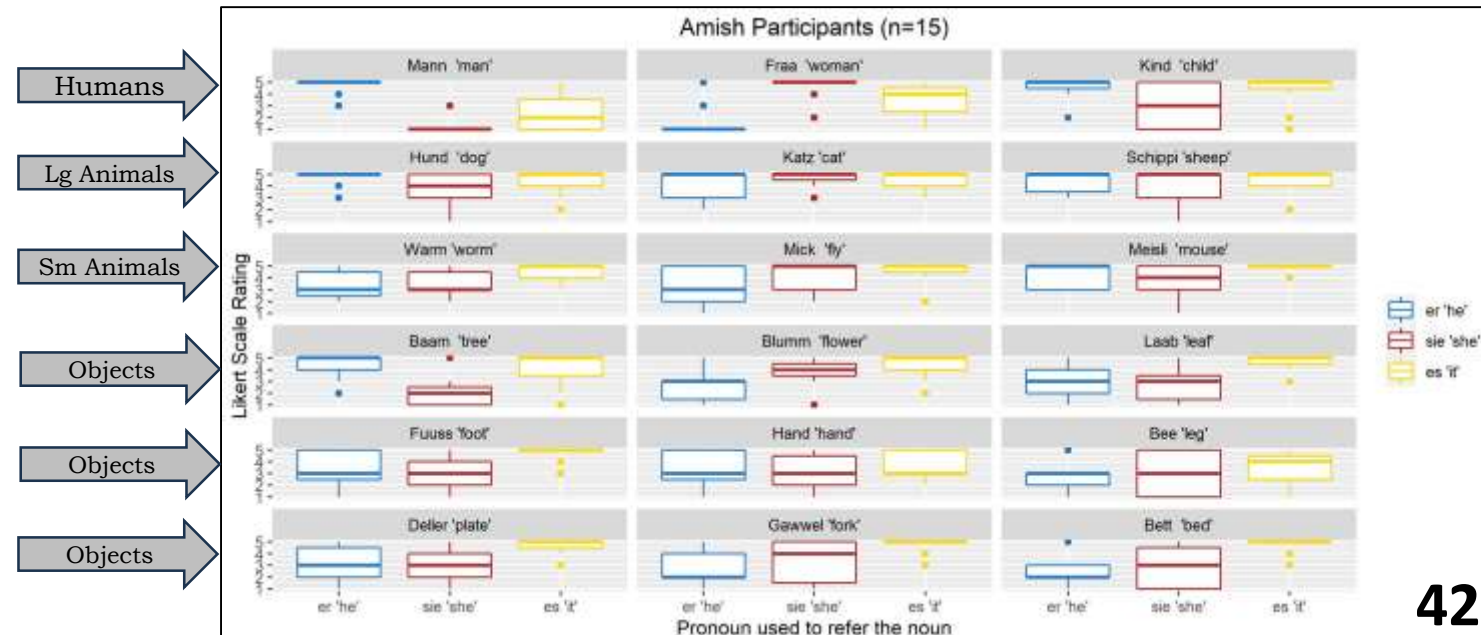
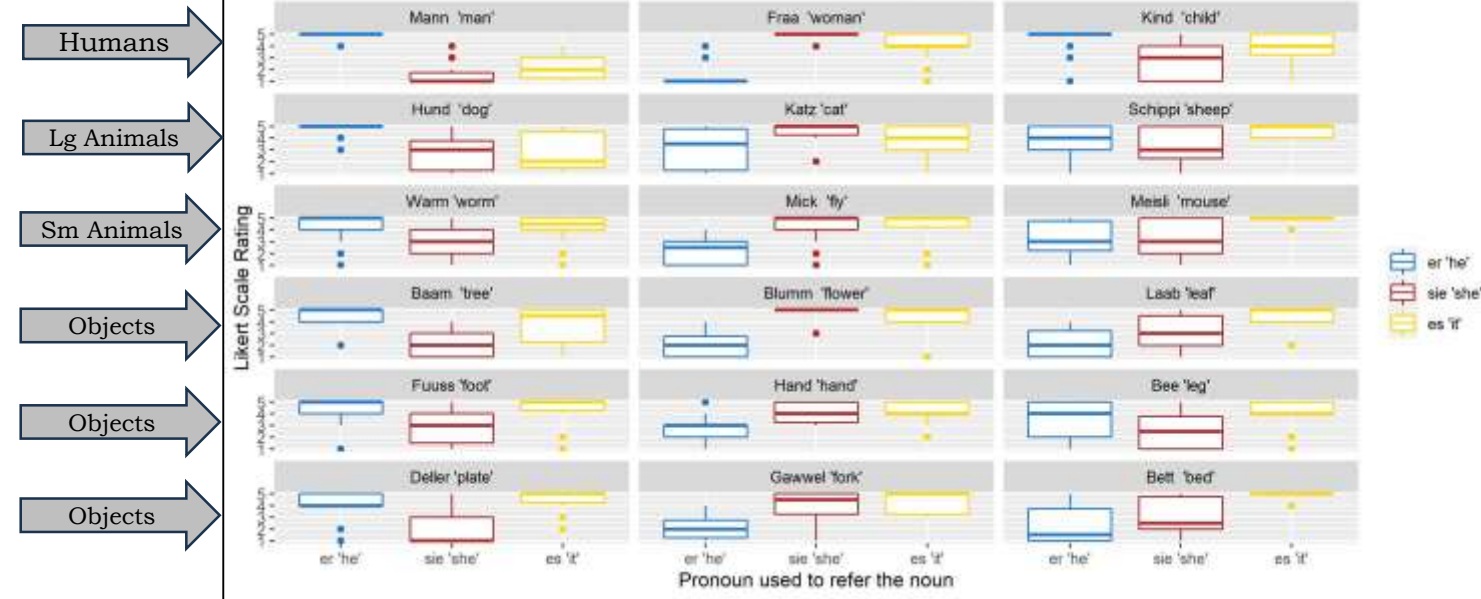
Animals:

- All three pronouns are acceptable for most speakers
- The Mennonites were more likely to prefer the grammatical gendered pronoun (for example, *he* for *dog*) but the difference is not large

Inanimate Objects:

- Both groups allowed *it* to be used even when *he* or *she* was expected
- Both groups preferred the grammatically correct pronoun over the ungrammatical one (*she* is better than *he* for feminine *Gawwel*)
- The Mennonites have a clearer preference for the grammatically correct pronoun even though they do also allow *it* in many cases

*When I did this same task with two German speakers, they always preferred the grammatically correct pronoun.



Summary

- Pronouns in both groups are being used more like they are in English at the expense of grammatical gender
 - Trees are referred to as *it* instead of *he* at least some of the time, vice versa for *child*
 - Biological sex and animacy matter (in addition to grammatical gender) when deciding which pronoun to use
- Mennonite and some (older) Amish speakers still produce a clear distinction between *der* and *die* but younger Amish speakers tend not to
- Both Mennonite and Amish speakers are producing *der* where *es* was historically the correct form of the article *the*
 - The Amish are doing it to a much greater extent
- Both Mennonite and Amish speakers did not complete the judgment tasks for articles and adjectives in perfect accordance with the historical system
 - The Mennonites were generally pretty high in target-likeness
 - The Amish a bit less so though their answers were not always off-target
- Plural marking was more consistent in both groups than gender marking
 - *Die* and the adjective ending {-i} were more likely to be produced and chosen than feminine *die* and {-i}

So, this is proof that Pennsylvania Dutch is just a broken mishmash, right?

- No!
- The grammatical gender system does seem to be getting more English-like generally
 - This does seem more advanced in groups that use English more
- BUT....
 - A. If we look around at other languages, these types of changes are typical
 - In fact, this is exactly what happened in English hundreds of years ago!
 - B. Not all the changes that we see are in the direction of English
 - The adjectives, for example, are doing their own thing
 - They are not simply falling away which is what they would need to do to be like English
 - C. Even though all this inconsistency can look disorderly, all it means is that the language is reshaping its grammar rules (a normal thing for a language to do!)
 - On the other hand, if we look at plural marking on adjectives with {-i}, we see a perfect example of a consistent grammar rule in PD
 - You can't say *die freindlich Leit*. You have to say *die freindlichi Leit* 'the friendly people'
 - D. Speakers of all languages, including PD, do not speak randomly. Their utterances are systematic and rule-governed. Even their "mistakes" usually reveal some kind of linguistic rule or tendency.

A word of caution to
all my PD-speaking
friends:

Where PD is spoken less, it is at greater
risk of being fully replaced by English.

Acknowledgments

- Thank you to the Young Center for hosting me and helping to make this research possible!
- A huge shoutout to Marie Crugnale whose contributions to my project made it possible for me to discuss all these results!
- Thank you to each participant who generously gave of their time and energy to answer all my strange questions!

Denki
schee fer
hariche!

If you know of anyone who may be interested in helping with my study, I would be glad to accept recommendations or give out my contact information.

Email: raf5568@psu.edu



References

- “Amish Population, 2023.” Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College.
<http://groups.etc.edu/amishstudies/statistics/population-2023/>
- Kraybill, D. B., Johnson-Weiner, K. M., & Nolt, S. M. (2013). *The Amish*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lohndal, T., & Westergaard, M. (2016). Grammatical gender in American Norwegian heritage language: Stability or attrition? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00344>
- Louden, M. L. (1988). *Bilingualism and syntactic change in Pennsylvania German*. Cornell University.
- Louden, M. (2016). *Pennsylvania Dutch: The Story of an American Language*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- “Old Order Mennonites (Horse and Buggy), 2023.” Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College.