

Amish Attitudes and Identity in Relation to Pennsylvania Dutch

Rose Fisher

Ph.D. candidate

Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

The Pennsylvania State University

raf5568@psu.edu

Abstract: Pennsylvania Dutch is the language of hearth and home for most Amish. As such, it serves the communication purposes of the in-group and is tightly interwoven with Amish identity. In this paper, I analyze data from a sociolinguistic survey that poses questions about language use, attitudes, identity, and religion. Current and former members of various Amish groups participated in this survey along with nonaffiliated descendants of the Amish. This study finds that each group—current, former, and descended—tends to have a different relationship with the language. Current members of the Amish and/or more proficient speakers unsurprisingly identify more strongly with the Pennsylvania Dutch language and their Amish background. Individual and region-based differences also emerge, demonstrating the complexity of the issues at hand and the diversity of Amish community practices and expectations surrounding language use. How current, former, and descended Amish view and engage with the language that sets them ethnically, religiously, and culturally apart from mainstream society has much to reveal about the interplay between minority languages and perceptions of ethnoreligious identity.

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Introduction

“The fact that languages are not only objective, socially neutral instruments for conveying meaning, but are linked up with the identities of social or ethnic groups has consequences for the social evaluation of, and the attitudes towards languages.” Appel and Muysken (1987, p. 16) make this statement in the context of outgroup evaluations directed toward a speaker group.¹ However, this applies also to speakers’ judgments of themselves and their fellow speakers. In a language such as Pennsylvania Dutch (PD)—which is spoken by a wide variety of groups—it certainly applies both for inter- and intragroup evaluations.

¹ It is important to note, however, that language is not the only important factor to consider when evaluating identity. Erhart (2019), for example, shows that the political boundary between France and Germany is more important for the identity construction of German dialect speakers in the regions on either side of the border than their mutually intelligible and closely related varieties of German. See also Edwards (2009, p. 1) for his cautionary note against considering only language.



Pennsylvania Dutch is a language closely related to German varieties spoken in Europe.² As immigrants from different regions in Central Europe came to the U.S. throughout the eighteenth century, their dialects underwent leveling and continued to develop independently of European varieties, forming a language variety that today can only be found on the American continent (Louden, 2016, pp. 13–15). Most of the founder population came from the area between Switzerland and the state of Rhineland-Palatinate in Germany. More specifically, most of them probably came from the Eastern Palatinate, which accounts for why PD structurally and lexically most closely resembles Palatine German dialects (Louden, 2016, p. 13).

Until the second half of the twentieth century, the non-separatist nonsectarians (also known as the church people), most of whom descended from Lutheran and German Reformed immigrants, composed the largest group of PD speakers (Louden, 2016, p. 65). However, PD is no longer the everyday language for most nonsectarians and has not been passed on to younger generations (Louden, 2016, p. 51). Though interest in PD remains alive among the nonsectarians, modern active PD speakers consist almost entirely of separatist³ Anabaptist groups such as the Amish and Old Order Mennonites (Fisher, 2022).⁴

For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on the Amish and leave aside other PD-affiliated groups such as nonsectarians and Mennonites. Though there are over 40 Amish affiliations making Amish life and societies very diverse (Kraybill et al., 2013, p. 138), all Amish groups speak a German-related vernacular language in addition to English, PD being the most common mother tongue (Kraybill et al., 2013, p. 122).⁵ As such, PD is an important part of the everyday lives of Amish individuals, “an essential indicator of [their] ethno-religious identity” (Louden & Page, 2005, p. 1391). For Amish Anabaptists, who believe they are called to live separately from the rest of the world, speaking PD in everyday life and using German for religious rituals function as clear markers of that separateness (Louden, 2016, p. 353).

How different Amish groups use and engage with PD varies based on each group’s cultural norms. In addition to a broad spectrum of Amish groups that find themselves at different points between more and less traditional (Brown, 2019, p. 21), there are also ex-members and nonmembers who speak PD and/or have Amish ancestry. Johnson-Weiner (1998) demonstrates these points when she says,

² Given that German and English are both Germanic languages, Pennsylvania Dutch and German are also related, though more distantly, to English.

³ The term *separatist* refers to a group’s aim to remain separate from the rest of society. At the very least, this refers to religious doctrines such as nonresistance. Amish and conservative Mennonites also use such things as dress, horse-and-buggy transportation, and limited technology use to set themselves apart. See Kraybill et al. (2013) for further discussion of separatist Amish groups.

⁴ See Fisher (2022) for further elaboration on the distinction between nonsectarian and Anabaptist sectarian Pennsylvania Dutch-associated groups.

⁵ Alsatian and Bernese are two other German varieties that can be found alongside Pennsylvania Dutch among the Amish of Adams and Allen counties in Indiana (Thompson, 1994).

Each church community has actively decided for itself the value of Pennsylvania German and the pattern of language use that most effectively represents the community's notion of itself and its place in the world. Thus, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and in other areas of Amish and Mennonite settlement, members of Old Order PG-speaking groups often live side by side with members of groups that used to be PG speaking, some of which may have shifted to English only a generation ago. (p. 378)

In reference to the situation in Big Valley, Pennsylvania, Page and Brown (2006) state that "the boundary between Old Orders, Mennonites, and the outside world can blur in communities with a rich Anabaptist legacy" (p. 138).

Kraybill et al. (2013, p. 164) estimate that about 15% of those born Amish will leave at some point in their lives. Sometimes these former members are socially cast out by their friends and family who disapprove of their leaving. For a variety of reasons, leavers may wish to distance themselves from their former community while remaining geographically near them. On the other hand, former members may choose to join a more progressive Anabaptist group, thereby reducing the spiritual distance between themselves and their roots. In these cases, former members and their descendants to varying degrees grow up in and live under the influence of their Amish heritage even if they are not practicing members.

Methods

This is not the first study to consider Amish identity and language attitudes (see, e.g., Moelleken, 1983; Johnson-Weiner, 1998; Page & Brown, 2006; and Brown, 2019); however, it is the first to my knowledge to consider these in relation to whether the subjects of interest are practicing members, former members, or nonpracticing descendants of a particular Anabaptist group. I explore the differences between these groups as they pertain to three aspects: (a) PD proficiency (on a spectrum from fully fluent to nonspeaking); (b) the extent of personal identification with PD and with the Amish culture in which it is embedded; and (c) attitudes toward maintaining the language and the value placed upon it. These foci lead to the following research questions:

1. How does language proficiency correlate with identity in each group?
2. What role do spiritual and generational distance from Amish membership play in the extent to which members of each group identify as Pennsylvania Dutch/Amish?⁶
3. What attitudes emerge in each group about language maintenance?

⁶ Geographical proximity is of course also relevant, but the survey questions and low number of participants in this study do not lend themselves well to considering this aspect.

I adapted a sociological survey taken from Moquin and Wolf (2023).⁷ It contained a total of 43 questions: one asked how the participant learned about the survey, nine requested non-identifying personal information such as age and gender, and 33 were open-ended and scalar multiple-choice questions about language use and attitudes (e.g., “How would you describe your personal level of speaking Pennsylvania Dutch?” with *fluent*, *near fluent*, *fair*, *limited*, and *non-existent* as possible answers).⁸ The survey was created and completed by participants primarily on Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>). I created an identical version on Google Docs that could be printed out and sent in as a hard copy. This made it possible for those who are current members of Amish communities to participate. In most of these cases, a non-Amish person printed out and distributed the surveys to the Amish participants. However, only those with access to such a printing service or to a cell phone or computer were able to participate, which explains the low number of Amish participants. Survey questions in both online and hard copy formats could be left blank.

Recruitment took place primarily online between March and December 2021. Participants were recruited by emailing PD researchers, enthusiasts, and heritage centers. These emails requested recipients to pass the information about the study on to anyone who may be eligible for and interested in completing the survey. Potential participants had to be 18 years of age or older, be U.S. citizens, and have at least one ancestor who belonged to a Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking group. This description should make clear that the Amish were not the sole targets of this data collection effort but rather that it was aimed at the whole Pennsylvania Dutch-speaking realm.

A total of 165 respondents completed the survey. However, only 40 of those were Amish or of Amish background. I will focus only on those 40 for this paper. Thirty-one were of Old Order Amish background, three were of Amish Mennonite background, and six had Amish in addition to Mennonite background. The more progressive Amish Mennonites usually allow more technology such as cars and electricity. Not all Amish Mennonites still speak PD, and many groups use more English than the Old Orders do (Brown, 2019). Nine participants were current members of an Amish affiliation (eight of an Old Order affiliation and one from the Amish Mennonites), 14 were former members who had left their Amish affiliation (two had been Amish Mennonites and the rest were from an Old Order affiliation),⁹ and 17 were of Amish background but never members of an Amish affiliation.

Participants came from a variety of states: Ohio ($n = 15$), Pennsylvania ($n = 13$), Indiana ($n = 3$), Iowa ($n = 2$), Kansas ($n = 2$), New York ($n = 2$), Illinois ($n = 1$), Virginia ($n = 1$), and Michigan ($n = 1$). Even within a single state, not all participants came from the same region/community,

⁷ My survey was created in collaboration with Hietpas and Vanhecke (2022) and Rucker (2022), who used similar surveys for different language communities.

⁸ See Appendix A in Fisher (2022) for the full survey.

⁹ By “former members,” I mean those who, at some point, belonged to an Amish community. I do not refer to baptized members. Unfortunately, it is not possible to report how old former Amish respondents were when they left their communities and which of them were baptized members at the time of leaving. The survey does not ask respondents for this information.

reiterating the point that these participants are highly heterogeneous in origin. The male ($n = 23$) to female ($n = 17$) ratio is slightly skewed toward males.¹⁰ The mean age of participants was 48.65 years ($SD = 19.70$), with a range from 19 to 83 years. The oldest age group (60 and older: $n = 17$) and the youngest age group (18–40: $n = 17$) contained the majority of participants, while the middle generation had only a few (41–60: $n = 6$).

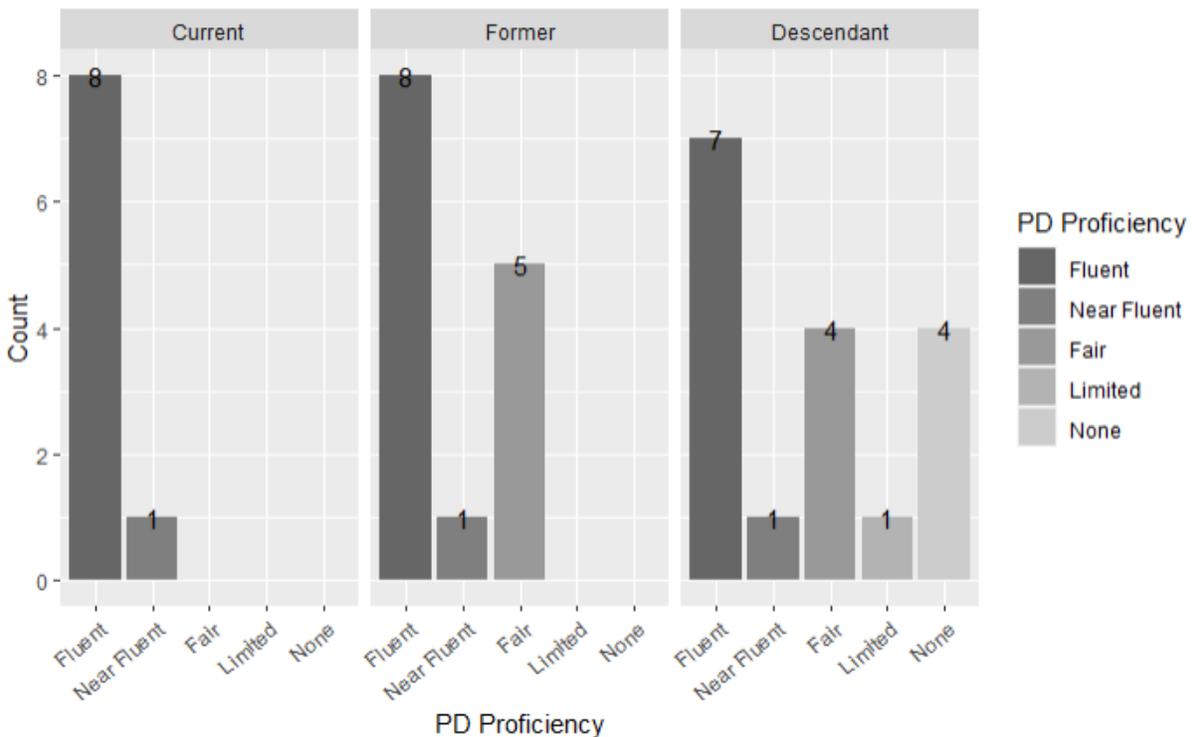
All nine current members of the Amish speak Pennsylvania Dutch, as do all 14 former members. Four of the 17 respondents who descended from the Amish do not speak PD, leaving 13 that do. Those who speak PD (36 of the 40 respondents) are native speakers who learned in their homes as children (including all three affiliated with the Amish Mennonites), with only one exception. One of the former members was not born into an Amish family but joined as an adult. I decided to include this participant—who learned PD as a second language—despite the lack of Amish background but will make note of their responses in the results section.

Results

All three groups of interest here (current, former, and descended members of Amish groups) include at least some PD speakers. In Figure 1—which shows self-rated proficiency on a scale of *fluent* to *no proficiency*—it is clear that the majority of respondents consider themselves to be fluent speakers ($n = 25$, 62.5%). We might expect that all native speakers of a language would consider themselves highly proficient. However, one current member of the Amish from New York and one former member from Michigan considered themselves “near fluent.” Five former members (including the second-language speaker) rated their proficiency as only “fair.” Since these responses were all self-reported without an investigator present, it is impossible to know why native PD speakers rated their proficiency so low. We can speculate, however, that it could be due to disuse (using English more and PD less since leaving their community), negative attitudes associated with the language and its culture, or other reasons. The “near fluent” response of the Amish person whose New York community almost certainly still uses PD may reflect the desire to remain humble about his abilities (see Kraybill et al.’s discussion of Amish humility, 2013, p. 103).¹¹

¹⁰ Sociolinguistic research has shown that biological sex and gender roles interact with language use in many communities (see, e.g., Edwards, 2009, chap. 7). Due to lack of space, I will not consider this factor in this paper.

¹¹ More specifically related to language, see Keiser’s (2012, pp. 160–162) discussion of PD and humility (*Demut*) among the Amish.

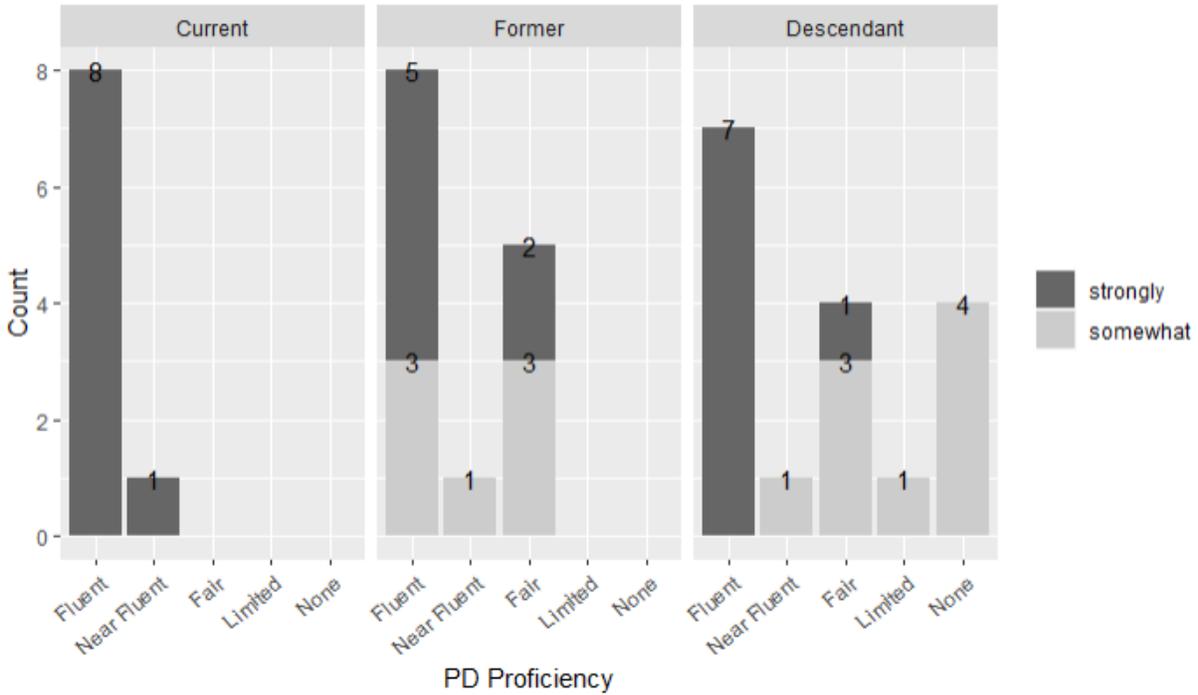
Figure 1*Self-Rated Pennsylvania Dutch Proficiency*

To try to ascertain the extent to which participants identify as Amish, they were asked the following question: “Which of these best describes your cultural identity? This refers to the culture of whichever PA Dutch group you and/or your ancestors belong to” (which would be Amish for all the participants of interest here). Possible responses included “I strongly identify with Pennsylvania Dutch culture,” “I somewhat identify...,” and “I do not identify...” Not only is it problematic that *Pennsylvania Dutch* and *Amish* are conflated by this question, the term *culture* is also concerning because it was not defined. How participants interpreted *culture* in this question can only be speculated. These issues must be considered when interpreting the responses.

All current members ($n = 9$; see Figure 2) identify strongly with Amish/PD culture. Half of the former members ($n = 7$) identify strongly, whereas the other half ($n = 7$) identify only somewhat. Among descendants, all fluent PD speakers ($n = 7$, 41%) identify strongly with Amish/PD culture, whereas most of the rest of the speakers identify only somewhat ($n = 9$, 53%). It is noteworthy that no participants responded “not at all.”

Figure 2

Strength of Cultural Identification by Self-Rated Pennsylvania Dutch Proficiency



I turn next to the question of generational and spiritual distance from affiliation with the Amish as a factor in determining identification with them. Fishman (1972) demonstrates the importance of distance in the following quote:

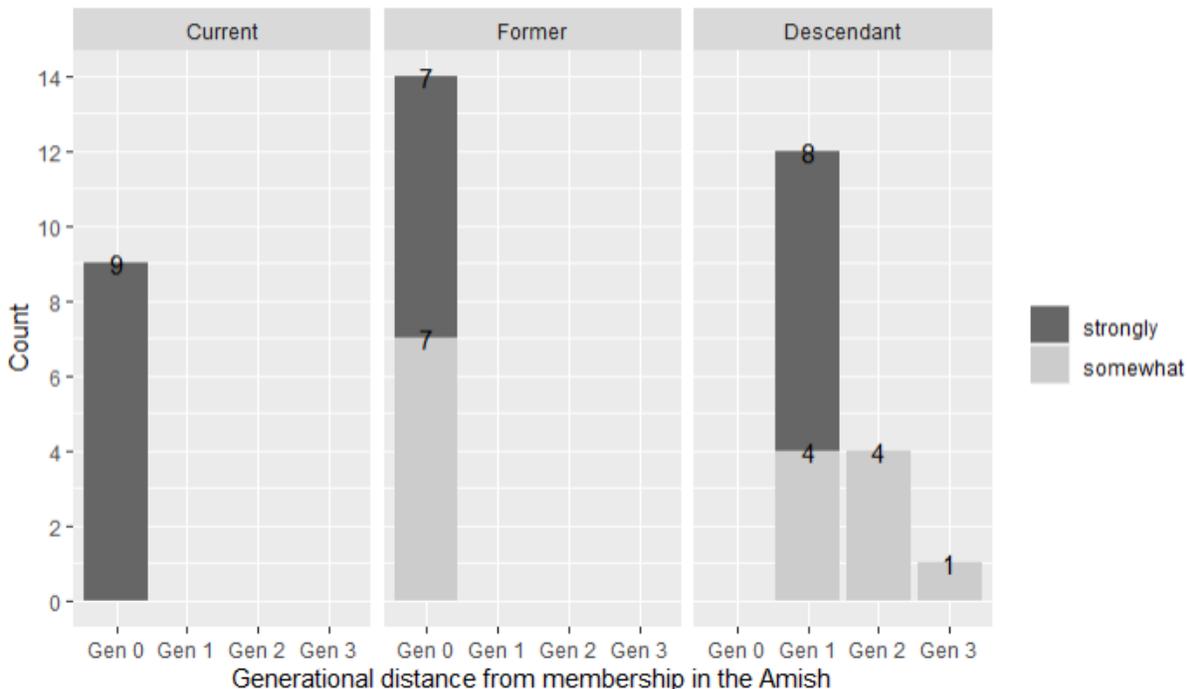
Language maintenance in the United States is currently strongest among those immigrants who have maintained greatest psychological, social, and cultural distance from the institutions, processes, and values of American core society.... Where neither ideological nor ethno-religious protection has obtained, language shift has proceeded in proportion to mobility within the larger sphere of American society, as reflected by indices of education, occupation, or income. (p. 54)

To examine this more closely, participants were divided by generational distance from Amish membership. Current and former Amish are considered Gen 0. Gen 1 refers to those whose parents left their Amish community, Gen 2 to those whose grandparents left, and so on. Figure 3 shows that all nine current Amish and seven former Amish (all belonging to Gen 0) identify strongly with Amish/PD culture. It should be reiterated here that the term *culture* was subjectively defined. Eight descended Amish from Gen 1 also identify strongly. On the other hand, seven former members and a few descended members from each removed generation group (Gen 1: $n = 4$; Gen 2: $n = 4$; Gen 3: $n = 1$) identify only somewhat. This indicates that distance from Amish culture (both in terms of whether or not respondents are practicing members as well as generational distance) unsurprisingly has a strong impact on how much people identify with the culture. Less distance

tends to correspond with stronger identification. There is no doubt that the most conservative Amish groups have been among the most successful immigrant groups at maintaining the distance from mainstream society referred to by Fishman, which has helped them to maintain their language and a separate society. Moreover, it is likely that this “psychological, social, and cultural distance” is among the key distinctions between those former and descended Amish who maintain PD and identify as Pennsylvania Dutch/Amish and those who are less inclined to do so. Given the nature of the survey questions explored here, it is impossible to prove this supposition or to know for sure why some former and descended Amish maintain more affiliation with the Amish than others. It is foreseeable, however, that former members’ and descendants’ experiences and interactions with the Amish (their volume and whether they were positive, negative, or neutral overall) have shaped the degree to which they identify with this aspect of their background.

Figure 3

Strength of Cultural Identification by Generational Distance from Membership in the Amish



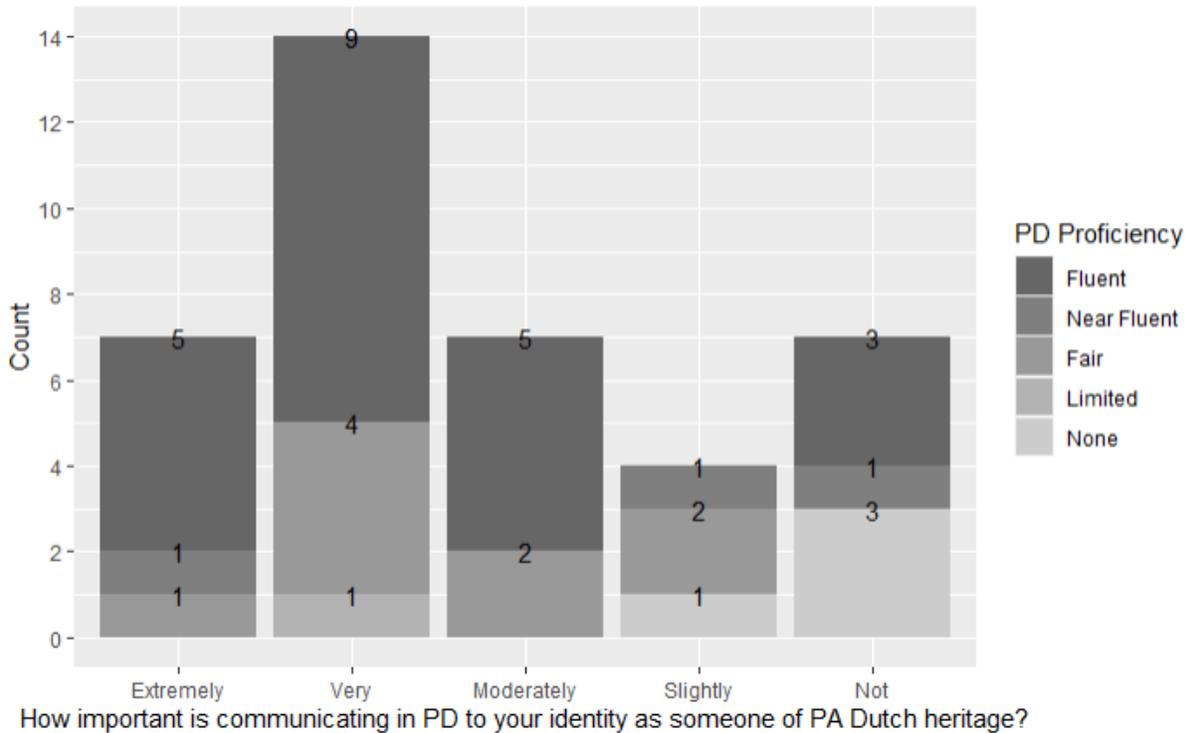
Note. Gen 0 = current or former member, Gen 1 = one generation removed (i.e., parent(s) was member), etc.

Returning to proficiency and value, I next examine responses to the question, “How important is communicating in PD to your identity as someone of PA Dutch heritage?” Of the 22 fluent participants, 14 consider PD to be either “extremely” or “very” important to their Pennsylvania Dutch identity (see Figure 4). Those who do not speak PD at all ($n = 4$) are the participants who value PD as part of their identity the least, with “not at all” ($n = 3$) and “slightly” ($n = 1$) responses. This aligns with Moquin and Wolf’s (2023) results from their work on American Icelandic. They found that lower proficiency tends to correspond with valuing a language less in personal use.

However, there is some nuance in these data. While eight of the fluent participants and the two near fluent participants value communicating in the language only moderately or less (“moderately”: $n = 5$; “slightly”: $n = 1$; “not at all”: $n = 4$), five participants with fair proficiency value communicating in PD “extremely” or “very” much (including the second-language speaker not of Amish background) and one participant with limited proficiency values it “very” much. This is the reverse of the aforementioned pattern and indicates that high proficiency does not always correspond with high value and vice versa. Bankston and Henry (1998)¹² found that Cajun French communities in Louisiana displayed some degree of ambivalence about language maintenance. Those who identified strongly as Cajun did not necessarily transmit the language on to their children due to the low status of the language.¹³ It is similarly possible that low social status as well as negative attitudes can lead to language abandonment in certain PD contexts, as we shall see in the discussion below.

Figure 4

Pennsylvania Dutch Proficiency by Value Placed on Personal Use of the Language



Note. One participant left the question blank.

Turning now to attitudes toward language maintenance, participants judged on a scale from *extremely* to *not at all* how important the maintenance of the Pennsylvania Dutch language in North America is to them (see Figure 5). The current members are overall positive or neutral with

¹² Qvarnström’s (2015) dissertation was helpful for locating this and other useful sources of sociolinguistic research.

¹³ See also Fishman (1972, p. 95) for his discussion of ambivalent factors that can either reinforce or jeopardize language maintenance depending on other sociolinguistic factors at play.

a mix between “very” important ($n = 5$) and “moderately” important ($n = 2$) responses, though interestingly none said it was “extremely” important to them. A reviewer pointed out that most Amish people are interested in the fate of the language within their own communities and would not be much invested in the status of PD across the country. It was suggested that this proclivity likely influenced these more indifferent-sounding answers. Louden (2016) states,

Old Orders themselves value their bilingualism in a strongly positive way. They all recognize the necessity of making certain compromises in order to maintain the ways they live out their faith, one of which is learning English alongside Pennsylvania Dutch and German. They are profoundly aware of the advantages that knowing more than one language brings, including to their spiritual life. (p. 315)

This too supports the claim that most Amish people can be presumed to have a vested interest in the fate of the language within their own communities.

For the former members, positive responses were relatively few (“extremely”: $n = 1$; “very”: $n = 3$). The more indifferent “moderately” response was most common ($n = 7$) and “not at all” responses were few ($n = 2$). Among the descendants, a higher proportion responded positively (“extremely”: $n = 5$; “very”: $n = 5$)—including one person who cannot speak PD at all—while a lower proportion responded with “moderately” ($n = 6$) and no one responded very negatively (“slightly”: $n = 1$). Page and Brown (2006, pp. 139–141) found that the attitudes of native PD speakers descended from Amish groups (now more progressive Mennonites) were generally negative. Some of them had difficulty interacting in English when they first went to school. Some were embarrassed by the language and did not want to be associated with it. According to Louden (1988, p. 19), such negative attitudes lead to unstable bilingualism and eventually monolingualism, which is, in fact, what happened in many Mennonite communities such as the ones of interest to Page and Brown. These reasons could help explain why some former members and descendants do not support language maintenance.

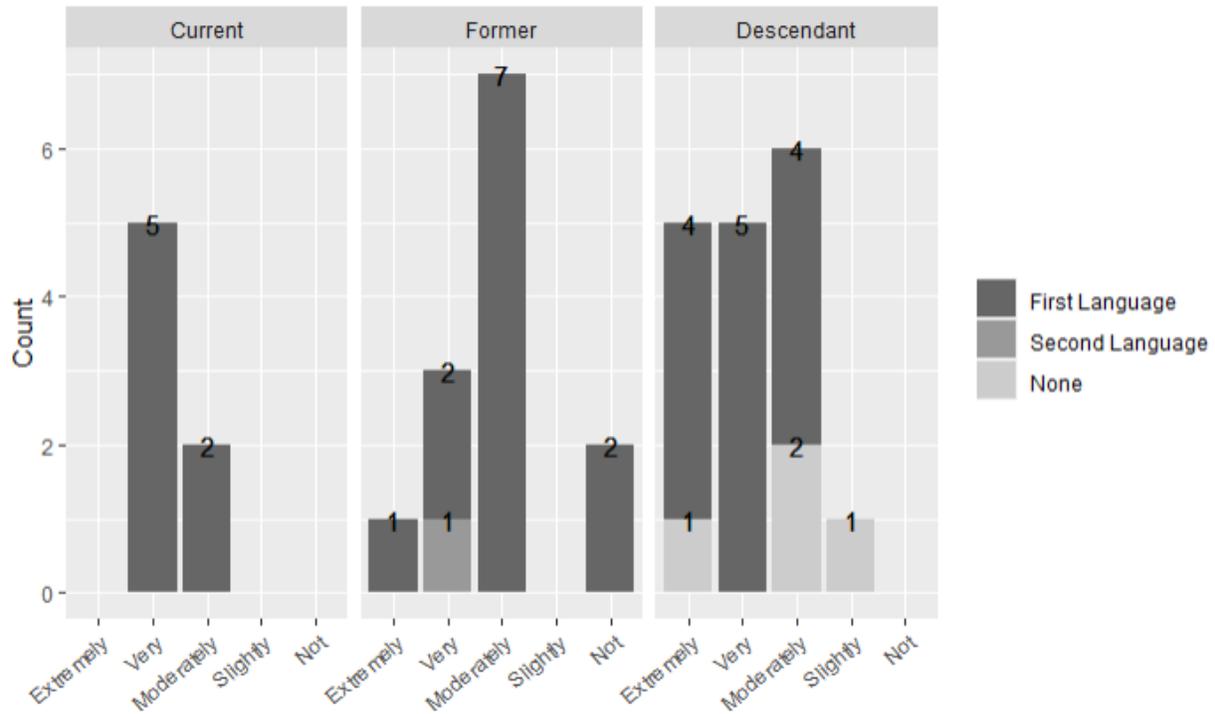
Nonetheless, there are also those who, despite their lack of close affiliation with the Amish, desire language and cultural maintenance. Fishman (1966) notes,

In some instances, indeed, it was only in America that many immigrants became aware of their “groupness,” i.e., of their common origin and their common past, as well as of their common current problems. Thus it was that only after immigration did language loyalty and language maintenance become aspects of consciousness for many. (p. 27)

This observation parallels nicely with the experience of those who leave the Amish and integrate with mainstream society. In many of those cases too, leavers and descendants of Amish groups are bound together by their shared heritage in ways that only become conscious after leaving.

Figure 5

Responses to “How Important is It to You that PA Dutch as a **Language** is Maintained in North America?”



Note. Three participants left the question blank. First Language = PD learned at home as a child; Second Language = PD not dominant language in the home during childhood; None = do not speak PD.

Paralleling the scalar question, participants were also asked to give an open-ended response to the question “Do you feel that you have taken an active role in maintaining the PA Dutch **language** within your family or community?” (see Table 1). Current members’ responses (1a, 1b, and 1c) reveal an overall nonchalant and/or positive attitude toward maintaining the language. It is a part of their everyday lives. Respondent 1a (from Middlefield, Ohio) indicates a desire to protect PD from the encroachment of English. Respondents 1b (from Kidron, Ohio) and 1c (from Mt Hope, Ohio) are also in favor of maintenance. This matches Moelleken’s (1983, p. 180) findings that the Old Order Mennonite and Amish respondents did not fear losing PD because their children spoke it. He also notes that while nonsectarian respondents were concerned about PD being a hindrance to their children, the Old Order Mennonites and Amish “did not regard knowing Pennsylvania German as a handicap” (p. 180). The current Amish Mennonite’s response to this question was a simple “no,” possibly reflecting a tendency to value PD less in his more progressive community.¹⁴

Former members’ responses are more varied. The participant whose response is shown in 2a (from Belleville, Pennsylvania) uses PD because it serves a functional purpose in their community while 2b (from Hutchinson, Kansas) is intentional about maintaining the language. Respondent 2c (from Topeka, Indiana) does not use the language unless the situation requires or encourages it

¹⁴ This Amish Mennonite participant is from Gordonville, Pennsylvania.

(e.g., with Amish family members). The person whose response is found in 2d (from Kidron, Ohio) strongly dislikes the language and associates it with a culture and society they disdain.

The descendants' responses also vary. Respondent 3a (from Strasburg, Pennsylvania) wants to speak PD and is mystified about why the Amish in their community are hesitant to engage with outsiders in PD. On the other hand, 3b (from Kidron, Ohio) indicates no problem using PD merely to serve the practical purpose of communication regardless of group affiliation. Response 3a might be explained by a proclivity among the Lancaster Amish to use PD only to address members of the in-group. Moelleken (1983) says that at least some Amish "claim that Pennsylvania German is their personal language and is only spoken with family, friends, and in the church" (p. 181). Milroy (1987, p. 36–37) notes that switching languages can be a form of signaling social distance. It could also be because the Amish in Lancaster use English more among themselves than previous generations did (Qvarnström, 2015). It is not possible based on such limited evidence to make conclusive statements about the strategic choice of English vs. PD in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, Amish community. However, this data suggests that the Pennsylvania and Ohio communities have different expectations about who should speak and be addressed in PD. Lastly, the simple "no" response in 3c (given by 3 respondents) is indicative of indifference or negativity toward maintaining PD.

Table 1

Sample Responses to "Do You Feel that You Have Taken an Active Role in Maintaining the PA Dutch Language Within Your Family or Community? If So, How?"

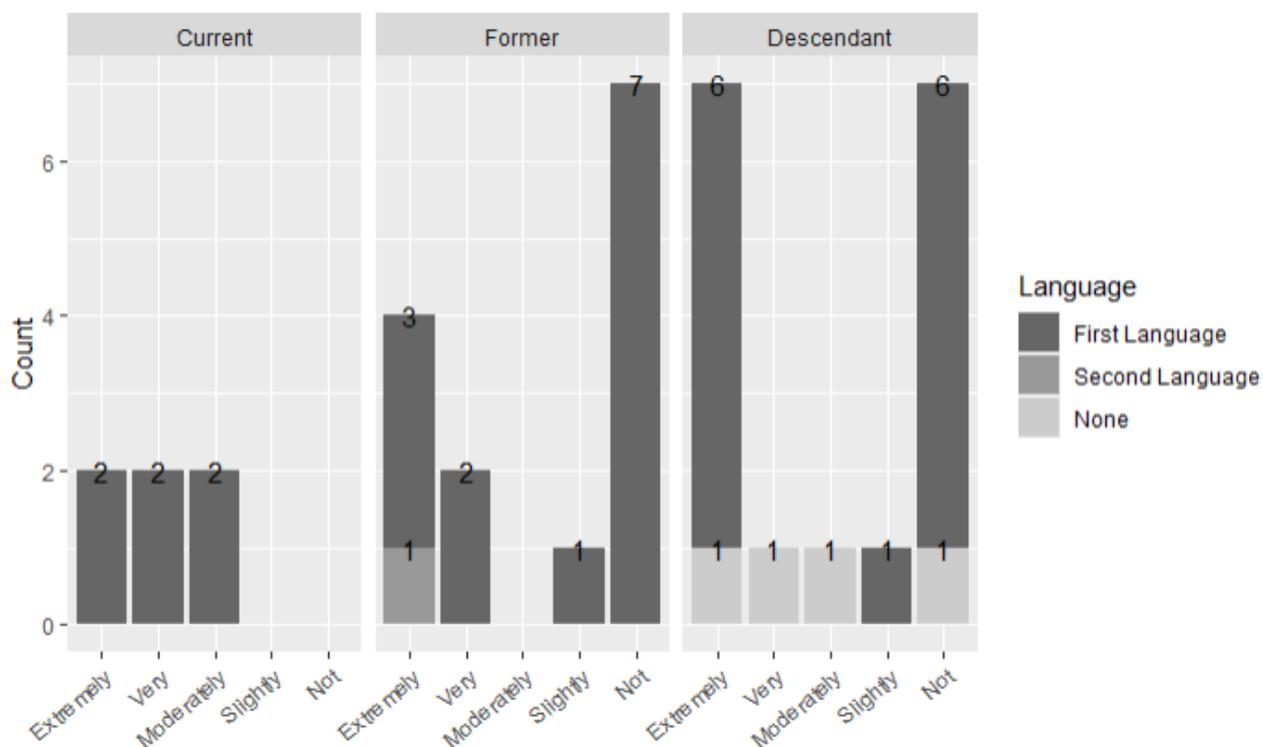
Status	Respondent code	Response
Current member	1a	"Yes, we keep the language alive by not mixing English and Dutch in the same sentences."
	1b	"Yes, every time we talk to anyone that speaks PA Dutch we almost always talk in that language."
	1c	By using it every day."
Former member	2a	"As my first language it comes natural[ly] to speak Pa Dutch to those of our community that speak Pa Dutch."
	2b	"Yes. By talking it to some of my kids."
	2c	"No, I just use it when I'm with relatives."
	2d	"I am of the opinion that PA Dutch is used to maintain control of the people and keep them in their tradition."
Descendant	3a	"Somewhat—I speak with my mother, siblings and other relatives when I get the opportunity. Community members (Amish neighbors) seem less and less wil[l]ing to engage in Dutch with me (folks who aren't Amish?)"
	3b	"Never really thought about it because I speak it almost ever[y] day and prob[ab]ly always will speak it because of my community I live in the Amish."
	3c	"No."

I turn, finally, to the question of religious practices in connection with language. Fishman (1972, p. 88) notes that religion can either strengthen language maintenance in immigrant groups or reinforce a language's demise depending on the priorities of the group. Among the Amish, for whom language (including both Pennsylvania Dutch and High German) and religious life are deeply intertwined with Amish culture and identity (Louden, 2016, p. 353), this factor is certainly at play. Moelleken (1983, p. 180) says that almost all of his Old Order Amish participants claimed to appreciate PD because of its connection to their religion. A statement in response to an open-ended question about the PD language (from the second language speaker who did not grow up Amish) also emphasizes the tight connection between language, religious practices, and Amish identity: "The culture is mostly about their religion. I left all that, so not really interested in perpetuating that." Further demonstrating this point, PD loss is usually correlated with the loss of German in worship services and increasingly progressive religious practices (e.g., evangelism) among those groups that have become (mostly) dominant in English (e.g., the Amish Mennonites; Louden, 2016, p. 310).

Figure 6 shows responses to the question "How important a role has religion and/or church activities played in maintaining the use of the PA Dutch language within your family or community?" These responses are not straightforward; however, open-ended responses to the question "In what ways has religion and/or church activities helped or hurt in maintaining the use of the PA Dutch language within your family or community?" help to clarify. Current Amish respondents agree that religion plays a role in PD maintenance in their communities. This conclusion is supported by statements such as "Most of the Amish kids go to an Amish school so they speak Dutch" and "We communicate in Pa Dutch before and after services." Former Amish and descendant responses are again more varied. Some respondents referred to the Amish communities from an outsider perspective (e.g., "It keeps them in their own capsule, just how they want it"; a statement from a former member who responded to the question in Figure 6 with "extremely"). Others responded to the question by referring to their own non-Amish religious communities (e.g., "My church family does not speak PA Dutch. PA Dutch is not used in any of my church activities." These are statements from a former member who responded with "not" important). This pattern of answering these two questions based on the participant's own interpretation suggests that the questions were not posed clearly enough. What can be said based on this data, however, is that the relationship between language and Amish religious practices is undeniable for current Amish (at least those who belong to Old Order affiliations; the current Amish Mennonite participant responded with "moderately"). For former and descended Amish, this connection is much less straightforward and varies greatly from person to person based on each individual's experiences.

Figure 6

Responses to “How Important a Role Has Religion and/or Church Activities Played in Maintaining the Use of the PA Dutch Language Within Your Family or Community?”



Note. Three participants left the question blank. First Language = PD learned at home as a child; Second Language = PD not dominant language in the home during childhood; None = do not speak PD.

Conclusions

Across all three research questions, group differences emerge. For research questions 1 and 2—the interaction between PD proficiency, identity, and distance from the Amish—current members are highly proficient and identify strongly; former members are highly proficient and identify less strongly overall, with a higher proportion of “somewhat” responses; and descendants have the highest proportion of low proficiency speakers, but still almost half identify strongly. The most PD-proficient descendants tend to be the ones who identify strongly. Those generationally further removed are less likely to identify strongly with PD/Amish culture. In terms of religious distance, Loudon (2016, p. 357) points out that those groups that historically kept PD the longest maintained the most physical and spiritual distance between themselves and English monolinguals. It is likely that this holds for those who leave the Amish and that those who remain in an Anabaptist faith with Pennsylvania Dutch roots (e.g., more progressive Mennonites) and/or geographically closer to Amish communities are more likely to keep the language alive and continue to identify with the Amish even after leaving. This could be more explicitly tested than it was in this study.

For research question 3—attitudes toward maintenance of language and culture—group differences again emerge. As bilinguals who use English and PD in fixed domains without one

threatening the existence of the other (Louden, 1988, p. 21), current members assume that their language and culture will be maintained by continuing their current practices. Their responses fit Louden's (1988, p. 19) description of the Amish as stable bilinguals who have positive or indifferent attitudes toward the language, viewing it as a tool that serves a functional purpose.¹⁵ While some former members are intentional about maintaining the language and culture of their heritage, others are openly disdainful and clearly desire to distance themselves. Descendants—who are much less likely than former Amish to have had negative experiences that are sometimes associated with leaving the Amish—in some cases are passionately and effortfully promoting the language, while others are indifferent.

One of the limitations of this study is the low number of participants, especially practicing Amish members. A higher number would greatly strengthen the validity of the findings. Furthermore, there are certainly region- and group (Amish affiliation)-based differences that cannot be accounted for with such a low number of participants. A greater number of participants from distinct regions and affiliations would tease apart and validate such differences.

As Louden (2016, p. 353) emphasizes, PD is deeply interwoven into Amish identity. It binds Amish communities together and sets them apart from the rest of the world. Johnson-Weiner (1998) claims that “language maintenance is not a passive act but an active assertion of identity, a choice to draw the line between those who are Old Order and those who are not or have ceased to be” (p. 383). Yet it is not the case that PD is only spoken by those who are currently Old Order Amish. How the interplay between Amish identity and language use impacts those who are not Amish but remain in some way affiliated with them has interesting implications for the multifaceted nature of identity. As a complex social, psychological, and emotional concept, identity can be better understood by investigations of this sort, which examine how diverse yet related ethnoreligious groups such as the broad array of Amish affiliations construct their identities and how those identities are bound to the minority language they speak.

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¹⁵ Qvarnström's (2015) work on the Lancaster Amish, however, suggests that for some in this community, English is encroaching on domains (such as the home) that used to be reserved for PD.

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