Contesting the centre: Low German-speaking Mennonite identity, language, and literacy constructions

by

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Author's declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

We make sense of who we are by talking about ourselves with others, telling stories about ourselves, our experiences, and our feelings. When we do this, we construct sociolinguistic spaces in which we speak, live, work, read, and play. These spaces are connected to geographical realities, or places, but consist far more of the practices in which we engage that give them meaning. When migrants move from one place to another, they construct new migrant spaces that contain aspects of their former place of living as well as their new one. Language plays a crucial role, because it is through language that we speak about ourselves, through language we construct spaces, and through language we position ourselves within those spaces.

This project examines how Low German-speaking Mennonite (LGM) migrants to Canada from Mexico construct a migrant space and position themselves and the languages they come into contact with, and how their constructions of identity and literacy are linked to their perceptions and use of language. LGMs are a marginalized minority population connected to the Old Colony Church, a religiously conservative Mennonite denomination who speak Low German (*Dietsch*) as a primary language. The data for this project consist of 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, individual interviews and focus group discussions. Drawing on an interactional sociolinguistic framework, narratives and conversations about language experiences are examined to illustrate how LGMs construct a migrant (*Dietsch*) space in Canada. Specifically, conversations about language attitudes, language learning experiences, and literacy practices are analyzed to determine how individuals position themselves and others in relation to the languages they encounter and the role these play in the *Dietsch*

space. The author finds that the LGM participants in the study demonstrate significant

agentive capacity by actively constructing and producing a *Dietsch* space that allows them to

contest not only what constitutes the centre of the broader Canadian space, but also contest

what constitutes the centre within the LGM migrant group.

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Dedication

For the Tuesday Ladies

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I mean, scientists say we are made of atoms, but a little bird told me we are also made of stories.

-Eduardo Galeano

Chapter 1 *Enndietsche*: An introduction

Un de HAR säd: Nu kjikj. Daut es aules een Volkj un dee räden aula eene Sproak. Dit es noch mau de Aunfank von daut waut see doonen woaren. Boolt woaren see aules doonen kjennen waut an biefelt. Well wie emol rauf gonen un an de Sproak verstieren, soo daut see nich eena dän aundren vestonen kjennen. Un soo vestreid de HAR an äwa de gaunze Launt. 1. Mose 11:6-8a

Und der HERR sprach: siehe es ist einerlei Volk und einerlei Sprache unter ihnen allen und dies ist der Anfang ihres Tuns; nun wird ihnen nichts mehr verwehrt werden können von allem, was sie sich vorgenommen haben zu tun. Wohlauf, lass uns herniederfahren und dort ihre Sprache verwirren, dass keiner des anderen Sprache verstehe. So zerstreute sie der HERR von dort in alle Länder. 1. Mose 11:6-8a

And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing they propose will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language, so they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the whole earth. Genesis 11:6-8a

The story of the tower of Babel is a story about a group of people who are initially united and then torn apart by language. First, they are bound to one another through language, a single language that unites them. This language allows them to understand one another, and connects them so deeply that they can work together seamlessly to make significant progress in building a tower to reach heaven. Subsequently, it is the confusion and mixing of their languages that breaks up their community, forcing them to stop their collaborative work, scattering them across the world. In the story of the tower of Babel, it is the language confusion that causes the scattering. In the case of many migrants, however, it is not the language that causes the confusion and conflict, it is the scattering, the migration itself that makes it difficult, and perhaps impossible, for speakers of one language to continue to understand one another in the same way they did when they all spoke the same language

in the same space. While the words are still the same, the experiences are so different that the people can become mutually unintelligible to one another.

Like many migrant groups, the Low German-speaking Mennonites (LGMs) have been scattered across the world—from northern Alberta to rural Nova Scotia, from the deserts of northern Mexico to the jungles of Belize. Language and faith and *Ordnunk* (order) kept the community together for generations of migrations from Reformation-era Europe to Russia to North America, South and Central America and back to North America again. The repeated migration was ostensibly an ongoing search for religious freedom to live in the ways their faith dictates. Low German (or *Dietsch*) bound the people to one another, allowing them to work together to successfully build villages and communities in vastly different climates. For generations, the Low German language allowed the people to effectively remain separate from the dominant societies in which they lived—sojourns in Russia, the Canadian prairies, and northern Mexico allowed them to work with large tracts of land to build and rebuild villages and colonies, thus constructing a space in which they could maintain and reinforce practices and patterns that bound individuals to one another.

Returning to Canada after a sojourn in Mexico results in a kind of language confusion for many LGMs. On the colonies in Mexico, language and communication practices are clearly established—while not strictly diglossic, in general terms, church and school are conducted in Mennonite High German, while much of the rest of community life occurs in Mennonite Low German. There is some minimal interaction with Spanish for the purposes of banking and business, and some interaction with English when relatives return from Canada. In Canada, the insularity of the community cannot be re-established. People often live far

away from any other LGMs, sometimes far away from any other people at all, especially in rural contexts.

Our experiences as individuals, and how we talk about them subsequently, are deeply rooted in a particular space and time, and can be studied within a specific sociocultural framework. When someone migrates from one space to another, the languages practices and cultural norms they have been socialized into must be re-evaluated and adapted to the new context. Migrants make choices about what practices, both linguistic and cultural, they will integrate into their new context, and thus construct a new space in their new country, but this is often not a seamless process.

Many LGMs struggle to acculturate in Canada because their framework for understanding the world often does not sufficiently account for their experiences in the Canadian context. Their struggles are multi-faceted—cultural, religious, and linguistic in nature. The interplay between these areas of struggle directly impacts identity and self-construction, as the individual must come to terms with being LGM in a broader Canadian context. They must find new and different ways of being LGM in the Canadian context, which can be a fraught and difficult process for some. At the same time, it can also be a process of productive discovery, as individuals learn to navigate community structures differently and on their own terms.

My project explores the role of language in how LGMs position themselves in relation to each other, LGMs as a group, and the broader Canadian culture in which they currently live. Loewen (2013), talks about the LGM "imagined village," which holds them together despite having been scattered, and it is the construction of this imagined village, of this

Dietsch space, that I will also examine. I am interested in the stories, in the narratives both large and small, which serve as semiotic resources in the positioning of individuals within this Mennonite space. Using an interactional sociolinguistic framework with a linguistic ethnography perspective, I conducted eighteen months of fieldwork, recorded individual interviews and focus group discussions, as well as informal conversations, in order to be able to analyze a variety of linguistic practices that serve to construct this sociolinguistic space.

To better understand how I found my way to the LGM community, and have an interest and investment in them, it is necessary to explain a little bit about the role they played in my growing up, including a trip to visit Mexico when I was a child. In my case, I have grown up knowing that there were LGMs in Mexico, and grown up knowing something about their lifestyle on the colonies, because my mother edits a children's magazine (*Das Blatt*) for Mennonite Central Committee that is sent to the colonies. The magazine contains Bible stories, short stories, puzzles, pictures to colour, and pages of letters that readers write to my mother. These letters always fascinated me, because they are snapshots of a distant life that other children were leading. They are often stark, almost list-like relays of information— a child's name, their birthday, the number of pigs and chickens and brothers and sisters they live with. Often the letters include some kind of information about what day it is—today is laundry day, or bread baking day, or visiting day.

As is common in publications that are aimed at the LGM population, such as *Die Mennonitische Post*, for example (Loewen, 2013), the children's letters also include *Erläwnissa* (experiences; events), which can be quite dramatic or macabre, such as drownings, or limbs being hacked off in farm equipment. Children will frequently list their dead siblings along

with their live ones—"I have five brothers but two are dead," and will relay these in the same stark, unadorned language as the fact that yesterday was visiting day. I remember being struck by the lack of *story* in these letters. As a child, I was an avid letter writer with pen pals in a few different countries around the world. The letters I exchanged with these friends were full of stories and images, important little kid elements, such as anticipating Christmas or a birthday, or a recent school trip or why my favourite colour was purple.

I tried having LGM pen pals, but I didn't understand them—I felt that I was not gaining insight into their lives from reading how many chickens they had on their farm or how many brothers they had. What I didn't realize then was that these letters provide profound insight into the lives of LGM children, especially in terms of what is valued in the culture, and how language reflects that. The children writing to my mother and to me were always writing in Mennonite High German, a language that is a prestige language on the colonies in as far as it is the language spoken in church and instructed in school, but a language that *Dietsch* people do not really connect with on a personal level (Hedges, 1996). They can read Mennonite High German, they are able to produce sounds that make words, to memorize and recite the catechism and to participate in church and community life, but it is not a language that they can use to express themselves or to tell stories. The real language of the people, of course, is Low German, which is the everyday language used at home and in the street, for business and community-building.

When I was eleven, my family traveled to northern Mexico for an anniversary celebration in Chihuahua. We were received as guests of honour, invited into people's homes, for *Schmaundküacke* (cream cookies) and *Knacksot* (sunflower seeds). This was a formative

experience for me because those letters I had read faithfully became reality as I drove through perfectly laid out villages with white fences marking property lines. It was incredible to me as a child walking through the villages, how it felt as though I was stepping back in time, in some ways.

The villages in Mexico are modeled after the villages in Russia, organized spatially around a central main street, containing neat rows of houses surrounded by white fences, fruit trees, a simple white church building, and further off to the one end of the village, the school with its adjoining teacher's house. The school is not immediately recognizable as any different than the church building, because unlike schoolyards in Canada, there is no swing set, neither baseball diamond nor soccer posts. The spatial organization of the villages can be seen as a manifestation of the value of orderliness among LGMs, and also serves as a striking contrast for the way LGM lives change when they migrate to Canada. Canada is a space that doesn't follow any rules of orderliness with which LGMs are familiar, where the borders of their lives are not the borders of their village, and where their understanding of and practice of place must change to accommodate the realities of the new and messier space.

In Mexico, I met people who reported having learned to read from my mother's magazine, often one of the only written materials they encountered outside of their school books, which are written in Gothic script. This was incredible to me, because at eleven years old, I couldn't imagine a life in which taking meaning from written words, in which books did not play a prominent role. I learned to read when I was six years old, after my first experience processing "Froggy Builds a House," I read everything I could get my hands on. What I did not realize then, and only came to realize as I was engaging in my fieldwork for this project,

was how fundamental the socially situated understanding of reading and literacy is to self-conception and identity construction, and certainly to any discussions of identity construction in relation to language.

The most memorable aspect of our trip to Mexico was our visit to an Old Colony Church, waking up at the crack of dawn to file silently into the building, sitting with my mother and sister while my father entered through another door to sit with the men. We stuck out brightly, my sister and I, being the only children in the building, the only ones without head coverings, the only ones who were not wearing dark patterned full-length dresses. I remember the rustle of songbooks, the buzzing of flies, and sitting up as straight as I could in the backless benches, watching an elderly woman sitting across from me falling asleep, sliding slowly downwards, and worrying that she would fall crashing to the ground in front of the whole congregation.

I will never forget the singing that occurred that morning, singing that occurs every Sunday morning in every Old Colony Church from Belize to Ontario. Even at that age, I prided myself at being able to read *Fraktur* script, and was able to process the text of the songs we were singing. But after the first word rang out in a wavering, nasal tone, I was lost. I could not understand the connection between the sounds the congregation was making and the text I knew to be in the book in my lap. Again and again I thought I had found the spot, the thread, only to realize that I was completely lost and had no idea what was being sung, though all the congregants around me seemed to know exactly where they needed to focus. When the preacher spoke, I found I didn't really understand that either; although he was reading Mennonite High German from the sermon book, the only parts I really understood

were the editorial comments he made with his own voice in Low German. The reading style is a high pitched sing-song, not unlike the drawn-out syllables being sung from the hymn book. The entire experience left me both confused and fascinated in equal parts. The linguistic practices used in the Old Colony Church were unlike any I had ever encountered. These practices are vital for full participation in the *Dietsch* community in Mexico, but they do not all translate equally well into the Canadian context. At the centre of this dilemma is the differentiation between sound and meaning, and the fact that a fundamental aspect of the LGM construction of literacy is the divorce of these two concepts from one another, a conceptualization that is at odds with the mainstream Canadian conceptualization of language proficiency and literacy.

Who I am was in part what allowed me to develop the relationships well enough to be able to undertake this project at all. I am a Mennonite—in ethnic background and religious practice, and this, along with my own experiences in Mexico, and the magazine my mother edits gave me credibility with the women I got to know more than any university affiliation or credential ever could have. LGMs have a tendency to be mistrustful of people outside of their community, especially individuals associated with universities, as a result of research that has been done in the past which did not respect their cultural values and caused significant trauma in the community in Ontario. Knowing this, it was important to me to be respectful of my participants, to learn from them, rather than to impose my own opinions or experiences on them. This attitude necessitated a variety of changes from my initial approach, from logistics related to securing ethics clearance to the actual content of interview conversations. It meant I had to commit to long-term relationship building with the participants, so that it

was clear I was not just someone who was swooping in to take their stories and leave again, but was someone who was committed to them as individuals.

Before I began my fieldwork, I had some expectations about what I would encounter. As a sociolinguist, I wanted a clear focus on language questions—language attitudes, language practices, language-in-use. I also wanted to concentrate on the significance of these linguistic considerations in the construction of migrant spaces, especially in light of Loewen's (2013) concept of "imagined village," as already mentioned above. Specifically, I was interested in how LGMs positioned themselves in relation to Canada and Mexico, and how they talked about the different places in which they live, work and interact. I also wanted to know what their attitudes were towards the different languages with which they came into contact, specifically English, Mennonite High German, Low German, Spanish, and French, and how those attitudes were negotiated in relation to linguistic practices in the community.

It quickly became clear to me, however, that there were other factors at play that I would need to consider. The first time I asked participants about what languages they speak, and every time after that, they talked about literacy practices, highlighting the difference between spoken and written language, the culturally constructed differences between sound and meaning. They talked about different ways of engaging with different kinds of texts every time I asked them about language because their linguascape, which is to say the languages, codes, and modes they encounter in their lives, is complicated and bound to literacy practices. I wasn't expecting this, but it became a central focus of my project. As such, it became important to add to my analytical approach an examination of how LGM language use might impact how they view and make sense of literacy, what the relationship was

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between language attitudes and literacy in the narratives participants told me, and also what the impact was of how literacy is constructed and positioned on how individuals construct their own identities and the *Dietsch space*.

Based on the fieldwork, individual interviews, focus group discussions and recorded conversations, I was quickly able to see themes emerging regarding linguistic and literacy practices important for identity construction, as well as language attitudes and language learning experiences that influence these for different individuals. For the purpose of this dissertation, I chose examples that illustrate the different linguistic and literacy practices that came up repeatedly in order to analyse the importance of those practices to their construction of the "imagined village."

The dissertation is organized into chapters that explore these questions by focusing on different communicative and literacy practices. I begin by outlining my theoretical framework in Chapter 2 *Theoretical considerations: Positioning selves in space and time*, providing an overview of the discussion about sociolinguistic space, positioning theory, and previous work on LGMs. In Chapter 3 *Methodological considerations: Data and analysis*, I locate myself in the research space, and provide an overview of the approaches I took to gathering and analyzing my data, including conversation analysis, narrative analysis, and linguistic ethnography.

In Chapter 4 *Onse Lied: Low German-speaking Mennonites in context*, I outline the historical and sociocultural context of the LGMs in Canada, paying particular attention to immigration trajectories and previous research on language and language use of this population, both in Mexico and in Canada. In this chapter, I also describe the individual

participants in my study in more detail in order to provide the broader context for the interactional analysis in the following chapters.

In Chapter 5 *Onse Sproak(en): Multilingual language use, language attitudes, and laughter*, I outline the linguascape that my LGM participants describe and interact with in different contexts, and analyze the language attitudes which govern these interactions. I also examine the ways in which different spaces and places—church, school, and home, in particular, affect how language hierarchies are set up and interpreted by the participants. I also examine how they co-construct and negotiate shared experiences of migration and transition space in interaction with one another, paying particular attention to the function of laughter as a semiotic and group-constitutive resource.

In Chapter 6, *"Ji meha jiliehet, je meha fitchiehet": Narratives of language learning, literacy, and identity*, I analyze how the women tell stories about their own English language learning experiences as new migrants in relation to the linguistic experiences of their children who are learning Low German as a heritage language, and what that means for their experience in public Canadian spaces.

In Chapter 7, *Spesearen enn mensajes schriewen: Texting as a literacy practice*, I examine the ways in which the group of women I worked with co-construct texting as an integral communicative mode, and connects the practice of texting back to language attitudes and literacy practices outlined previously.

In the concluding chapter, *Conclusions and Further Directions,* I summarize my findings and point to areas that have remained unexplored due to limitations of time and space.

This dissertation contributes to sociolinguistics in that it examines the narratives and identity constructions of a group of migrants who share a primarily oral language, and works to tease apart the factors that influence these migrants' ability and desire to integrate into the Canadian context. Specifically, it explores the relationship between multilingual literacies and identity from an interactional perspective. Additionally, it contributes to Mennonite Studies in that it offers a perspective that moves beyond a historical examination of LGM experiences and identity constructions. Much of the research that exists on LGMs takes the Old Colony Church as the central organizing principle, and a broader perspective allows for a more nuanced examination of a variety of ways LGMs have of enacting their identities in language, regardless of the church context.

The story of Babel is an origin story, an explanatory metaphor for why different languages and cultures exist in the world. In applying it to the LGM context, it is this origin I want to underline. It should also be noted that the Bible from which this story comes is foundational to the worldview of LGMs and therefore additionally fitting. Just as the story of Babel was not the end of the world, but rather the start of a new thing, a richness of cultures and languages throughout the world, the construction of an *Dietsch space* in Canada is similarly the construction of a new thing. The *Dietsch* space LGMs construct in Canada is not some sub-standard version of life in Mexico, or a less-than version of dominant Canadian norms. Within the parameters of LGM cultural values and norms, related to language, religion, and community, the LGM women I worked with for my study are developing new practices, new ways of being, knowing and speaking themselves that create new subject positions for them to take up and push the boundaries of the *Dietsch* space.

The LGM women I have met are people who push back. They demonstrate a clear and nuanced understanding of linguistic power dynamics and norms, how they themselves are viewed and positioned both among LGMs, as well as in the wider Canadian context. But they are not people who simply accept the parameters and categories laid out for them, whether by the expectations of the church, or the expectations of the dominant Canadian society. Instead, when they talk about themselves, about their experiences as migrants, about the experiences of their children, they tell stories of subversion. Their stories are stories of asserting their own identities—as women, as mothers, as *Dietsche*, navigating between linguistic systems and opposing expectations to build lives and selves that are a part of the world, but not of it. Always, they are interacting with and negotiating discourses that govern what and how they can be. They do this through code choice, they do this through laughter and teasing, they do this through texting, and they do this through the stories they choose to tell. This is a dissertation about those stories—the ones they choose to tell a university researcher about their language experiences.

When I first began my fieldwork, and was explaining to the women what I wanted to do—to hear their stories about Low German, their stories about language and coming to Canada, they were perplexed and somewhat suspicious. Why would I want to know about those things? Who was I, anyway, and why was I still going to school? And yet—the more time I spent with them, built trust with them, the more they told me. In this dissertation, I argue that the ways in which participants talk about themselves contest the norms and hierarchies of both the dominant Canadian culture as the country in which the women live, but also the culture of the Old Colony Church. How they negotiate the tensions between these two worlds, as reflected over and over again in their stories and interactions, constructs

a kind of "in-between" space, a *Dietsch* space, a space that allows for the inclusion of people

who have left the Old Colony Church, and perhaps even for those who were never part of it in

the first place.

Chapter 2 Theoretical considerations: Positioning selves in space and time

Introduction

Human experience is necessarily located within space and time. Indeed, as Harvey (1989) writes, "space and time are basic categories of human existence" (p. 201). The so-called inconsistencies that arise between the experiences themselves and the ways in which they are expressed in narrative and in interaction, bring to light the tensions between aspects such as geographical place and constructed space (de Certeau, 1988), and story time and discourse time (Genette, 1980). I will begin by considering space as a theoretical and social concept, and then consider time in terms of the role it plays in the construction of space. I will then discuss the ways in which we position ourselves in the act of talking about ourselves and things that happen to us. Finally, I will examine both the role of narrative in positioning, and the role of positioning in the personal narrative.

Space and place

While it should come as no surprise that theories of place and space originated in human geography, they have made their way into sociolinguistics by way of other disciplines, particularly sociology (e.g., Gieryn, 2000), and philosophy (e.g., Lefebvre, 1991; de Certeau, 1988). These theories are different in the ways in which space and place are conceptualized, and in the question of who constructs these spaces and places—whether the emphasis is on individuals or institutions or discourses. The ways in which space and time intersect in narrative and interaction and are seen as socially constructed are what makes them important to sociolinguistics.

Gieryn's (2000) seminal article reviews the relevance of place and space in human geography and particularly in sociology. He writes that place must have three defining features: a geographic reality or location, material form, and meaning and value that are derived from human investment (pp. 464-465). In other words, you have to be able to find it on a map, be able to touch it, and you have to consider it to have some kind of meaning, whether that is related to some kind of practice that takes place there or is associated with it. Space, however, has neither a geographic location nor material form, and as such, as Gieryn contends, was considered by many social scientists to be too abstract to be meaningful to humans and too nebulous to be a useful concept. Some, however, recognized that spaces are not simply abstract gaps between places, but rather they are actively and socially constructed. Soja (1989) writes that while "space in itself may be primordially given, [...] the organization, and meaning of space is a product of social translation, transformation, and experience" (p. 80).

Both places and spaces are "locations of human practice" and the human practices themselves, taken together, construct the space. However, whereas

> a place is constructed through deliberate, top-down human action such as that carried out by urban planners or interior designers, as well as through the use of particular manners or foods or linguistic practices habitually carried out in those places[,] a space, on the other hand, is constructed—in the sense of social constructivism [...]—through the much more bottom-up process of interaction between the human beings who occupy it or otherwise make reference to it (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2013: 16).

It is precisely this issue of space being constructed through interaction that turns it into a central consideration for sociolinguistics. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2013), among others (cf: Baynham, 2003), use the term "sociolinguistic space" to refer to the social space that is created precisely through interaction, and it is this term I also wish to use here. In sociolinguistics as well as in other social sciences, there are different understandings of the precise meaning of place and space. Blommaert (2010) and Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck (2005), for example, invert the terms place and space, meaning that place is what is constructed through interaction and space is the geographical reality. However, there is some consistency among scholars, particularly those working in the areas of narrative and identity (cf: Baynham, 2003; de Fina 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2013), who use de Certeau's (1988) concept of space being "practised place," (p. 118) and it is this one with which I also align myself.

De Certeau's focus on "practice" is of particular importance here, that spaces are constructed and enacted through engagement in a variety of social practices. De Certeau gives the example of walking through a city to illustrate this concept of "practice." In his example, a city block itself is a place, a geographic reality, with buildings and streets. A space is constructed that is linked to that place when an individual walks down the city block, because the individual walking through the city enacts and constructs the city as a space through the "spatial acting out of the place" (p.98). De Certeau himself connects this spatial acting directly to language. "The act of walking," he writes, "is to the urban system what a speech act is to language or to the statements uttered." (p. 97). Taking this a step further, it becomes important to see interactional practices, as well as recounting or retelling of social

practices, as precisely the spatial practices that serve as the building blocks for the construction of the space.

The fact that individual migrants must navigate the complexities of different cultures and languages and that they must negotiate both personal and group identities in all aspects of their lives, makes sociolinguistic space a valuable concept for analyzing their experiences. Specifically, sociolinguistic space is a particularly useful tool because it can address many of the criticisms that have been levelled against similar tools of analysis that start with the concept of community, whether that is a community of practice or a speech community, rather than a space. The problems with community have been outlined by Gee (2005: 214-215) as follows:

1. The idea of community is connected to the idea of belonging or close personal ties among people which do not necessarily exist in every context where the concept of community of practice has been used as an analytical tool (e.g., classroom, workplace)

2. The idea of community is necessarily connected to the concept of "membership," and of people being "members" of a particular community of practice. However, as Gee notes, "*membership* means such different things across different sorts of communities of practice, and there are so many different ways and degrees of being a member in some communities of practice that it is not clear that membership is a truly helpful notion" (p. 214).

3. Wenger (see Wenger et al, 2002), who originated the concept of community of practice, has been careful to outline what does and does not qualify as a

community of practice, but the term has been used by others to cover such a wide

range of different configurations of people that it has become such a nebulous

notion that it is questionable whether it is really useful.

In other words, Gee identifies the main problem of the concept of community of practice as

being that it requires the labelling of groups of people, and then making decisions about who

exactly is a member of a particular group and who is not. The problem thus lies in the

researcher labelling who belongs to what group or category from the outside. A concept such

as "sociolinguistic space," however, allows the researcher to observe and analyze the ways in

which spaces emerge in interaction, as well as the ways in which people locate themselves in

these spaces, and the ways in which people participate in meaning-making within that space.

Sociolinguistic spaces are conceptually closely connected to semiotic social spaces.

Semiotic social spaces, as outlined by Gee (2005), consist of three parts: a generator, a set of

signs, and portals. The generator is essentially what the space is about, and the associated set

of signs emerge from this space, and portals are essentially anything that gives individuals

access to the space. The set of signs can then be analyzed internally, as a type of content, or

externally, as the types of practices that individuals engage in in relation to the set of signs.

In other words, in the construction of *Dietsch* spaces constructed by my participants, the

generator can be conceived of as "*Dietsch*-ness," the set of signs are practices that people

engage in and reference in the construction and re-construction of spaces, such as speaking

Low German or reading the Bible, and the portals might be Old Colony Church meetings,

community outreach groups that are attended by LGMs, visits to Mexico, or other, informal

gatherings. Semiotic social spaces are necessarily "sociolinguistic spaces," since much of the

social practice that makes up the set of signs, as well as the portals, relates to and is constituted by language. For my purposes, I concentrate on the practices that relate directly to language and its use—specifically verbal interactions with others, but also engagement with written text.

Space has been brought to the forefront in the social sciences, and in sociolinguistics in particular, because of increased globalization phenomena, specifically increased migration and individual mobility. This has resulted in an greater interest in issues such as transnationalism and diaspora, and an awareness of the complexity involved in navigating multiple spaces and negotiating identity within these contexts. Migrants necessarily have a place of origin and a place in which they currently live, and they construct (often unwittingly) a space that includes aspects of both. Their *sense of place,* which is the feelings and associations they link with a particular geographic location, indexes a certain space, and their spaces, in turn, are anchored in particular places. As Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2013) write, "since the indexicality between a space and a place is remote in a situation of migration, and because spaces do not have the same sort of solidity of material form that places do, immigrant groups need to constantly continue to construct their group's space in the new place of living in order to maintain it" (p. 18). This work of construction and maintenance is done "not only by engaging in their own surroundings (developing cultural and communicative competencies in relation to these surroundings), but also by activating wider flows and circuitries (allowing them to stay in touch with distant social realities and alternative social imaginations)" (Jacquemet, 2010: p. 51).

The cultural specificity of these migrant spaces, which are characterized by the signs and the portals to the spaces, become particularly evident in cases of migration, when migrants make attempts to access an existing sociolinguistic space in their new place of living, while still remaining connected to the sociolinguistic space of their place of origin. What results is the construction of a new sociolinguistic space that incorporates aspects of both original spaces, something which is characteristic of the migrant experience as a whole. Migrants construct local spaces that are, for example, German-Canadian, in the case of the migrants in Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain's (2013) sample, or British-Moroccan, as in Baynham's (2003) sample.

If we look at language practices associated with different spaces in particular, Blommaert, Creve, and Willaert (2006), have found that when migrants move to a primarily monolingual place, they are quickly characterized as having language problems, and rendered "language-less and illiterate," (p. 53), even when they are fluent in multiple languages, as a result of the shift in linguistic repertoire required to function fully in the new place. Miller (2010, 2012) has found, however, that despite the language ideologies influencing the (in her case) English-dominant American space, the spaces the migrants construct legitimize multilingual language practices. This is in keeping with Blommaert's (2010) findings that migrants tend to construct "locally legitimized multilingual spaces," which constitute multilingual practices as desirable and valued, even when an individual works with only "bits of language."

One of the fundamental ways in which transnational migrant spaces, such as *Dietsch* spaces, are constructed is through language. According to Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain

(2013), language is constitutive of the space in two fundamental ways: first, through the migrant group's use of language, which is to say their perceptions about accepted linguistic practices, such as code-switching or mixing, and second, through their specific language-in-use, or talk-in-interaction, through which they position themselves and others within their particular space and time; I will return to positioning later on in this chapter.

Space and time

Sociolinguistic space has both a vertical dimension, which refers to the hierarchies of relationships between people and groups within the space, as well as a horizontal dimension, which refers to the ways in which the space can change over time. In other words, it does not only matter where a person is, but also when they are, when it comes to identity and space constructions (Jenkins, 2008: 49). The horizontal dimension further refers to the ways in which one individual's relationship to a particular space may change over time and from interaction to interaction in moment-to-moment ways. When people migrate from one place to another, their *sense of place* is brought with them based on the particular moment in time at which they leave their place of origin. Migrant groups must constantly reconstruct their migrant space in order to maintain it, and the temporal dimension plays an important role in this continued reconstruction. The *sense of place* a particular migrant brought with them of their place of origin fifty years ago is not the same one that a migrant from the very same place would bring along today.

This transnational space, in my case, the *Dietsch* space, for example, can accommodate all of these associations in the sense in which Blommaert (2010) defines "layered simultaneity," (p. 126). Layered simultaneity refers to the fact that a space can be

constructed differently by different people simultaneously *and* at different times. These

different constructions necessarily have a variety of associations, and this multiplicity of

associations in both horizontal and vertical dimensions is itself constitutive of the space. In

other words, layered simultaneity allows for different people to construct the space

differently across both time and space, which of course means that what makes a space a

"*Dietsch* space" or a "German space" can change over time, and mean different things to

different people. As such, these spaces do not *contain* particular lasting qualities per se; it is

the lasting qualities that individuals *associate with* them that serve to construct and maintain

the spaces. As Lefkowitz (2004) writes,

> every day life [...] involves a negotiation of meaning in 'space' from the structures and
>
> practices of 'place.' People structure spaces through their symbolic practices, and spaces
>
> structure people's sense of identity by insisting upon a particular frame within which
>
> symbolic practice unfolds. Such recursive narratives of space-making accumulate over
>
> time, generating dialogic webs of reference and comprising a community's historical
>
> memory (p. 32).

Space and time have been of particular importance to sociolinguistic research on narrative,

but Baynham (2003) argues that the concept of time has been privileged over the concept of

space in narrative analysis. He credits Bourdieu with the "theoretical move of

retemporalization," (p. 349) in Bourdieu's (1979) work *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, but

Baynham disagrees with Bourdieu's conflation of time and "story space," something I will

return to later in this chapter. Recounting a story about one's life forges a link between the

there-and-then and the here-and-now, and as Harré and van Langenhove (1991) write, "the

distinction between past, present and future does not go over neatly into psychological time

partly because the social and psychological past is not fixed" and perhaps more importantly,

"the social future can influence the social past," or at least the way in which it is constructed

and interpreted (p. 394).

The role of space and time in sociolinguistics is changing from simply being relegated

to the "orientation" component of a Labov and Waletzky's (1967) narrative structure. Like

Bourdieu (1979), Labov and Waletzky (1967) conflate time and space, reducing them to mere

context. However, as Baynham (2003) writes, "orientation/disorientation/reorientation in

space and time, far from being a simple contextual backdrop <u>is</u> the story," (p. 351) which I

understand to mean that space and time can be seen as semiotic resources through and in

which participants position themselves in interaction. It is important to note, however, that

in the literature reviewed by Baynham (2003), Blommaert (2005), Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain

(2013) and others, it becomes clear that time, while a separate concept, should be considered

along with space, since time forms a vital aspect of any constructed space, and works as a

resource for identity.

Theoretical elements for *Dietsch* space

Space (as something socially constructed) is anchored in place (a physical reality). In a

migrant context, specifically, the construction of a space includes aspects of the place of

origin, and the place where they currently reside, as well as any other places that they may

have encountered in between or in a particular group's historical memory. There is a

potential problem, however, with binding space too tightly to place, as the conceptualization

then runs the risk of binding the concept of space too closely to the idea of nation-state, and

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thus to Anderson's (1983) influential but problematic concept of "imagined community."

Anderson holds that a nation is essentially an "imagined community," which is constituted

and unified by print capitalism and secularism. Anderson's notion of nationalism and the

linear relationship between nation-state, language and community has been challenged,

however, because it essentially brackets out the possibility for multiple interpretations of a

particular "national" reality. His model does not allow for differences in the construction of

identity of people who share a place of origin, and place of origin is far too limiting a concept,

particularly in the case of LGMs, whose history is characterized by multiple migrations and

multiple languages. Specifically, I am referring to groups who would first identify with their

religio-cultural, rather than national categorization—such as Orthodox Jews (cf. Stolow,

2004), Doukhobors (Androsov, 2011), or LGMs (Loewen, 2013).

While it is true that LGMs construct an imagined community in the sense that "all

communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact […] are imagined," as

Anderson wrote, Loewen (2013) notes that

> the Mennonites' imagined pan-American village [… is] imbued with nostalgia, religion,
>
> and cosmology to pull them not into a nation but apart from one. For the Mennonites,
>
> the imagined ethno-religious village, spread out from Canada to Argentina, link[s]
>
> people within several nations, turning villagers into transnational subjects (p.176)

Loewen's "imagined village" is different from Anderson's "imagined community" precisely

because it allows for a space that is not first and foremost tied to a geographical reality.

Rather, it is tied to a historical understanding of self as separate from nation which is

prevalent among LGMs. Loewen's "imagined village" is not about an actual local village, but

rather a connectedness that comes from an imagined shared experience, and an imagined

shared understanding of the world that is not tied to secularism, as Anderson's model is, but

rather to a particular religious understanding, and particular organizing principles that grow

out of it.

As a synthesis of both Loewen's "imagined village" and the concept of sociolinguistic

space, I argue for the existence of an "imagined space," which I will call, for my purposes,

"*Dietsch* space." The concept *Dietsch* space encompasses the imagined nature of LGMs'

connectedness to other LGMs, (and, it could be argued, to other Mennonites in general), as

well as the social practices that construct the sociolinguistic space and serve to construct the

experience for LGMs. However, it further serves to describe going beyond the anchoring of

spaces in particular places that have been experienced by individuals to include the ways in

which Mennonites long for a space or homeland that they have in some cases never seen (e.g.,

Russia), or a space they have not returned to for a long time (e.g., Mexico).

This space is further characterized by a history of continued migration in search of a

homeland where they could live in peace and have control over education and religious

practice. Epp (2011) has written about different Mennonite groups being either backward

looking, as in nostalgically looking towards the so-called "homeland" of their forefathers, or

forward looking, as in continuously seeking a "homeland" where they can be free to live out

their religious faith in all its extensions as they feel called to without worrying about

governmental interference. This religious freedom is part of the reason why LGMs continue

to move throughout Central and South America, and one group has recently explored the

option of returning to Russia (Epp, 2011). This "imagined space" then describes the space that

is created through narrative and collective memory, and is only loosely (or in name only) anchored in a geographical place.

Dietsch space is a constructed sociolinguistic space, influenced by historical and religious factors outlined above. Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain (2013) write that "when interactants construct a sociolinguistic space, they do so first and foremost by constructing an image of the space itself—its borders and shape—but also, and even primarily, by constructing images of their own and others' positions within the space" (p. 25). In other words, when participants construct a Dietsch space, they are necessarily speaking themselves into particular positions and locations within that space, making different aspects of their identities relevant at different times and for different reasons. How this works and what it means is what I will discuss in the following section.

Identities and Positioning Theory

Before considering identity constructions as related to space, I will first discuss the idea that identities and selves are constructed. Defining identity may seem straightforward— identity is who you are and where you belong—but it is not so simple. Neither are identities fixed, rather they are constantly in flux, being constructed and reconstructed through the complex ways in which we talk about ourselves. This is to say, identities are constructed *in interaction*, when we talk to other people, whether we are talking about ourselves explicitly or not (Bucholtz & Hall, 2010). The act of speaking, and language itself, forces us to take up a position in a particular space and negotiate our identities in any given moment, and as such, different aspects of our "selves" are made relevant at different times, and what we highlight and draw upon to construct ourselves as we speak changes from moment to moment.

This is not to say that we are necessarily a significantly different person from one moment to the next, however, and we are further limited by the positions that are available to us at any given point, depending on the colour of our skin, the languages we speak, and our past experiences. Furthermore, an individual's previous experiences become "sedimented" and can serve as cultural resources for interpreting new information and new experiences (Miller, 2010). Blommaert (2005) describes these processes as follows:

> [the individual is situated] in relation to several layers of (real, sociological) 'groupness' and (socially constructed) 'categories' (age category, sex, professional category, but also national, cultural, and ethnolinguistic categories), situating this complex in turn in relation to other complexes (young versus old, male versus female, highly educated versus less educated, and so on), and situating this identification in relation to the situation at hand, making selections that result in 'relevant' identity. (p. 204).

Baynham (2011), talks about aspects of our identities as being "brought-along" and "brought-about," where "brought-along" refers to the "groupness" that Blommaert (2005) references, specifically the "set of historically accumulated embodied orientations to the discursive event" (Baynham, 2011), while the "brought-about" refers to that which is enacted and negotiated within a particular interaction at the linguistic level. There are particular autobiographical categories that we accumulate over time and which tend to be fairly stable (although this is not to say that they cannot be challenged, reinvented, or performed differently), such as age, birth place, race, class socialization, etc. The experiences we collect as, for example, a white middle-class Canadian woman, make certain positions available to us

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while the experiences collected as a man, for example, or as a woman of colour, open up different ones. At the same time as these categories are brought along to a particular moment in discourse, they are being repeated and reinvented interactively, which is to say the way in which "the speaking subject quite literally, performatively, talks up an identity position in discourse" (Baynham, 2011).

The act of speaking itself creates a position, so it is impossible to interact without both positioning oneself and being positioned simultaneously. Given this repeated (and inescapable) identity positioning in interaction, the concept of space is useful for examining identity, in terms of how identity is understood and how it is performed. At the same time, identity is a necessary part of space construction. Blommaert (2005) calls identity in interaction a "semiotic process of representation," perhaps better formulated as *self-representation* (p. 219). In other words, it is the act of locating oneself in a particular space, and highlighting particular aspects of one's brought along identity as relevant to a particular interaction in a particular space. At the same time, an important consideration is that the space through which people, and migrants in particular, move is never an empty space. In fact, as Blommaert (2010) puts it, "they are always *someone's* spaces" (p. 5). Since this is the case, individuals must locate themselves within the space and take up positions in relation to different people, groups, other spaces, and even other locations within the space (Giampapa, 2004).

I would argue that time works in a similar way in relation to identity. Individuals must necessarily always locate themselves in space *and* time in order to construct their identities. As indicated above, for the purpose of personal narratives, Baynham (2003) calls this

synthesis of time and space a "story space," but he seems to limit this term to narrative talk (p. 353). In effect, space and time form a *chronotope*, to use the Bakhtinian term, literally the inseparability of space and time, which Bakhtin describes as "spatial and temporal indicators [being] fused into one carefully thought out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin, 1981: 250). Baynham (2014) argues further that the historicization of the utterance itself is what makes it possible to capture and analyze it. In other words, time and space are achieved locally and interactionally, a process which is "socially, symbolically, and culturally mediated" (Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2013: p. 32).

As has already become clear, the concepts of space and identity are linked, because people bringing different aspects of their social identities to the foreground in different contexts is how they locate themselves in space and time. For my purposes, identities are viewed as manifested in the ways in which people talk, something which is collaboratively done in interaction, and dynamic and changing in different contexts. The way in which this can be operationalized is through the lens of positioning theory. Positioning theory takes its name from Michel Foucault's notion of "subject positions." According to Foucault, "subjects are positioned by hegemonic discourses in terms of status, power and legitimate knowledge, which determine their interpretation of self, world and others" (Deppermann, 2013: 64). "Positioning" conceptualized as something that happens within interactions, was first applied by Davies and Harré (1990), who viewed positioning as the production of selves, "whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (p. 48).

In their considerations on identity and positioning, Norton and Toohey (2011) write that Davies and Harré (1990) were the first to use "position" in reference to the ways in which individuals manifest their subjectivity in language. In fact, Davies and Harré considered "position" to be the "central organizing concept for analyzing how it is that people do being a person" (1990: 7). Norton and Toohey go on to say that

> in poststructuralist theory, subjectivity and language are seen as mutually constitutive, and are thus centrally important in how a[n individual] negotiates a sense of self within and across a range of sites at different points in time. It is through language that a[n individual] gains access to, or is denied access to, powerful social networks that give [people] the opportunity to speak. (Norton & Toohey, 2011: 417).

The centrality of language to the process of "doing being a person" is what I would like to draw attention to here. Language itself, but especially language-in-use is how individuals position themselves and others. Particular words themselves can be powerful tools for positioning. For example, the use of personal pronouns (we vs. they, for example), place references (here vs. there), and especially, in multilingual contexts, the choice of one language over another to express particular aspects such as categories the speaker affiliates with and expresses attitudes about. Non-verbal aspects of communication can be just as powerful, however, such as silence or the absence of response to a particular utterance, or laughter as a commentary on the content of a conversation or relationship constituting mechanism. These minutiae are where identity is constructed, because it is through these fine-grained details that broader themes and stories are constructed and relationships between concepts or people are established and made clear. These choices (whether

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conscious or not) are some of the linguistic practices that construct spaces in the sense of de Certeau's "practiced place."

The spaces constrain the kinds of identities that can be performed, legitimizing certain linguistic practices as desirable and valued, thus marginalizing those individuals who do not participate in the same practices (Miller, 2012; Blommaert, 2010). As such, there are only certain patterns and identities that are relevant or even available to be constructed within certain spaces. These linguistic practices are what constitute the space itself. Multilingual practices in particular should not be seen as dichotomous to monolingual practices. Instead, according to Otsuji and Pennycook (2010), they should be viewed as part of a symbiotic semiotic "apparatus" (p. 244), reciprocally restructuring what constitutes the practices themselves, and informing what can be located at the centre of a particular migrant space. Similarly, while a predominantly monolingual space will not be completely transformed by multilingual language use, Miller (2012) argues that these monolingual spaces are certainly re-configured because of the co-existence of "viable multilingual spaces" (p. 464).

The way we position ourselves in these spaces is one of the ways we make sense of our lives. We further make sense of our lives by organizing them into storylines and then telling those stories to others. However, these stories of sense- and meaning-making are not static, nor do they occur in isolation, since these stories are always speaking into or against a wider context. In broad strokes, positioning is a process by which participants make certain aspects of their personal and social identities relevant during various points in a conversation through linguistic means. This is to say that they make choices among competing storylines

to position themselves and others in a particular way. Harré and van Langenhove (1991) conceptualize positioning as a way in which subjects locate themselves in dialogue and in the world, and write that it is "a dynamic alternative to the more static concept of role" (p. 393). The process of choosing which story and position to tell is, far from being static or fixed, constantly changing based on who is doing the telling and to whom.

The process of positioning makes use of the semiotic links to linguistic forms, which is to say it links linguistic forms or choices to broader categories of association, and interactants bring their cultural and linguistic knowledge to bear on making meaningful connections in these associations. In other words, the analysis of positioning establishes "linkages between language choices [on the micro-level], and larger processes beyond the here-and-now of interactions" (Georgakopoulou, 2007: 121-122).

Harré and van Langenhove (1991) define positioning as "the discursive construction of personal stories that make a person's actions intelligible and relatively determinate as social acts and within which the members of the conversation have specific locations" (p. 395). In other words, particular positionings index particular categories in the social world that are known to the interactants. Harré and van Langenhove (1991) further distinguish between five different varieties or "modes" of positioning, and Dailey-O'Cain and Liebscher (2009), among others (cf: Bucholtz & Hall, 2005), add an additional variety. These varieties are not mutually exclusive and ways of positioning can be recognized as more than one of these varieties simultaneously.

a. First and second order positioning refers to the initial positioning and the subsequent positioning of the other interactants involved in the conversation.

b. Performative and accountive positioning refers to the positionings that occur when
    initial positioning is questioned, either in the conversation directly (performative) or
    later in a subsequent conversation (accountive).

c. Moral and personal positioning refers to positionings related to moral hierarchies or
    individual characteristics.

d. Self and other positioning refers to the necessary positioning of the other in the
    positioning of oneself. When one is positioned, the other automatically is positioned,
    too.

e. Tacit and intentional positioning refers to positioning that is either unconscious
    (tacit) or conscious (intentional). Performative and accountive positioning, for
    example, must always be intentional.

f. Formulaic and narrative positioning refers to the ways in which positioning is either
    made explicitly or implicitly.

However, according to Deppermann (2013), "Harré's approach does not do justice to the
fact that not only the positions ascribed, but also the meaning off acts of positioning is an
object of interactional negotiation," and as a result, Bamberg (1997, 2004; Bamberg &
Georgakopoulou, 2008) has proposed three levels of positioning to account for these
ambiguities.

1. Level 1: positioning of characters in a story world (whether or not the person telling
    the story is telling it about themselves). This level is concerned with biographical, or
    brought-along aspects of identity in the there-and-then of the story world.

2. Level 2: positioning of participants in the interaction, in relation to other conversation participants. This level is concerned with the immediate interaction, and the local identities that are made relevant within it.

3. Level 3: positioning participants take with respect to D-discourses and master narratives. This level is concerned with the positioning of participants in relation to larger social structures.

Looking at Bamberg's three levels in addition to the varieties outlined by Harré and van Langenhove (1991) is useful because the three levels of positioning account for the multiplicity of subject positions which are always being taken up at once, and accounting for multiple processes that are at work at the same time. The differences in Bamberg's and Harré and van Langenhove's models show that positioning is a highly complex, multi-faceted undertaking, during which many factors are converging at once. While Harré and van Langenhove (1991) conceptualized of *varieties* of positioning that could occur simultaneously, Bamberg's idea of *levels* or layers adds depth to the consideration. Examining processes of positioning based on both varieties and levels is useful because it allows for analysis of both micro- and macro-processes of positioning. On the micro level, for example, one can examine effect of a code-switch in the interaction, while linking it at the macro-level to language ideologies related to multilingualism that privilege monolingual language practices.

An effective way to operationalize the connection between a position and what it indexes is to use Sacks' (1992) membership categorization analysis (MCA), which was expanded on in relation to positioning by Deppermann (2013). MCA is the analysis of the "situated and reflexive use of categories in everyday and institutional interaction, as well as in

interview, media and other textual data" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 38). As part of this kind of analysis, categories are grouped together in ways that index certain information about the members of those categories through a membership categorization device, in which "categories (including 'members') are [...] linked to particular actions ('category-bound activities') or characteristics ('natural predicates')" (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006: 39). Any time an interactant positions someone else, he or she does so by indexing the categories associated with that positioning, and assumes that other interactants will be able to make associations based on the societal and cultural knowledge they possess. This is why Sacks (1992) called these categorizations "inference-rich" (p. 40)—because when a particular categorization is employed, members of a particular society or cultural group use their cultural knowledge to determine what is being indexed by the use of the category. In this way the ways of positioning are connected to and embedded in the wider social world. While MCA is useful for accounting for relevant categories for identity construction, it can usefully be expanded upon to explore concepts of agency in relation to identity construction and positioning, which I will do in the following section.

Agency and capital

The ways in which participants position themselves and others within migrant spaces is governed by a variety of complex processes. Giampapa (2004) uses the idea of periphery and centre (based on Giddens, 1984) to describe how migrants position themselves and other members of their migrant group, wherein centre refers to "a group of people who define and reproduce social, political, institutional, and linguistic norms and have access to symbolic capital and material resources" (Giampapa, 2004: p. 193). In other words, the centre is the group of people that decides who meets the criteria which define what constitutes the centre

of the space, whether this is a majority or minority space, and thus, who has claim to a

particular migrant identity. The periphery, then, refers to anyone who by virtue of not

meeting the established criteria is pushed to the margins of a particular space. Giddens

(1984), as well as Labrie (1999) and Grimard (2000), concern themselves primarily with centre

and periphery as it is manifested in a dominant culture. In Canada, for example, the

inhabitants of the centre would be white, upper-middle class, able, cis-gendered men who are

Canadian-born Anglophones between the ages of 30-65, living in urban centres and actively

producing knowledge/power in the Foucauldian sense (Grimard, 2000: 6). This narrow

definition of centre brackets out wide swaths of the Canadian population, and most certainly

any migrants. The concepts of centre and periphery are, however, also necessarily applicable

to migrant spaces, as Giampapa (2004) has shown.

As indicated by Giampapa (2004), the locations of the centre and periphery within a

particular space are connected to the Bourdieusian concept of "capital," which is to say the

cultural, social, linguistic, as well as material aspects that are imbued with value in a

particular community. Giampapa (2004) shows that migrants, who in many ways already find

themselves on the periphery of a larger Canadian space, must also navigate the centre and

periphery of their *migrant* spaces. However, she demonstrates that individuals have a

significant amount of agentive capacity in making different aspects of their identities relevant

at different times and thus shifting their position from periphery to centre or vice versa, due

to the overlapping nature of the dominant Canadian space and the minority migrant space

that is governed by its own hegemony.

In his discussion on spatial practices, de Certeau (1984) offers categories of action that are useful for our purposes here—strategies and tactics. In her discussion of de Certeau's concepts of strategies and tactics in relation to agency, Miller (2012) writes that "strategies [are] agentive acts of the powerful who produce, define, and impose meaning on spaces, and tactics [are] the agentive acts of the less powerful by which such spaces of the powerful Other can be appropriated and reconfigured" (p. 447). While there are social processes at work in different social spaces that govern what (and who) is acceptable, individuals are not completely constrained by these social processes, but rather have various kinds of agentive capacities to contest and reconfigure these structures.

Miller (2012) writes about the "agency of spaces," and the ways in which people use linguistic practices to construct positions that allow individuals to maintain and exert agency, and how these processes construct and delineate multilingual migrant spaces. An important differentiating factor in the discussion of agency is the differentiation in agency that can be teased apart using Bamberg's three layers of positioning—in telling a story about oneself or other people, one can position oneself as having "different kinds of agentive capacity," to quote Miller (p. 445), in the story world (level 1), although the same individual might be constructed or positioned as having different kinds of agentive capacity in the interaction itself (level 2), and different kinds again in relation to the dominant discourses (level 3).

Agency is a particularly salient concept in my data, and the tension between the different kinds of agentive capacity afforded by the three layers described above is both overtly referenced and tacitly present in my data in many places. Thus the construction of identity in conversation is always a negotiation between the different layers outlined by

Bamberg, and the agentive capacities an individual has in how they are positioning themselves, especially in contesting dominant discourses or practices.

Agentive capacity can be seen as linked to the same categories Bourdieu (1986) outlines with his concept of capital. In his considerations on the nature of capital, Bourdieu references different aspects that give an individual symbolic value within a particular cultural system. The different kinds of capital he references are economic, cultural and social. Economic capital refers to the money and assets an individual possesses. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital can be divided into three main forms—embodied (e.g., an accent or dialect), objectified (e.g., material possessions such as a work of art), and institutionalized (e.g., an advanced degree from a prestigious university) (Bourdieu, 1986). Essentially, cultural capital encompasses all of the knowledge and skills, as well as other advantages that a particular individual might have which give them value and standing within society. Social capital is related to how a particular individual is connected to other individuals in a network. The more symbolic capital an individual possesses, the more powerful a subject position they can inhabit within society, and the more agency they have to take up a central position in a space.

Of particular significance for this thesis is the role of linguistic capital, which, as outlined by Bourdieu (1977), is the knowledge of various languages and/or dialects, and the ability to use these languages to one's advantage at an individual level. Particular spaces have different language ideologies, which hierarchize languages in order of prestige. How languages are positioned within particular spaces gets complex when various overlapping spaces compete with one another, such as *Dietsch* space and Canadian space, for example.

The complexity arises because what precisely constitutes cultural capital in general, and linguistic capital in particular, is different across different spaces. This is especially relevant in the case of migrants who move from one location with a particular understanding of what constitutes their value as an individual (in terms of language, education, socialization) to another, where they find that there have been changes and shifts in their individual value.

In the LGM context, religion and church membership are powerful categories for making sense of the social world and for constructing identities and *Dietsch* spaces. Like language practices, religious practices and requirements shift in the Canadian context as compared to the Mexican context. Although Bourdieu did not really address religion or faith in terms of his theories related to social value, Verter (2003) has applied Bourdieu's concept in the context of religious communities using a concept which he calls "spiritual capital." In religious communities like the Old Colony Church (the most common religious association within the LGM community), which are fairly closed and conservative, being a "good *Dietsch*" is something that is of utmost importance, as in general, most aspects of Old Colony life are related to church and faith. In the Old Colony context, this means maintenance of a particular way of life that adheres to regulations aimed at constraining "sinful" behaviour, and a focus on sameness with other church members. "Spiritual capital" is a useful concept for conceptualizing of the intersection of aspects related to faith—adhering to church rules regarding dress and conduct, use of a particular language for church services, and engaging in particular literacy practices, such as reading the Bible and memorizing the catechism. Where individuals are positioned within a *Dietsch* space in terms of centre and periphery is very closely connected with their standing within the church community and their adherence to these aspects. In the following section, I will further discuss aspects related to linguistic

capital specifically, focusing on the interaction between language attitudes and ideologies, especially in the migration context of the LGMs.

Language attitudes, language ideologies, and literacies

Like identity and space, language attitudes are difficult to define and capture long enough to analyze, particularly because individuals can display and express conflicting language attitudes on a moment-to-moment basis. Much of the previous research on language attitudes has been quantitative and cognitive in nature—focusing on the reproduction of language attitudes in experimental settings. An interactional approach allows for an examination of the expression of language attitudes in a moment-by-moment way, which in turn allows for an analysis of the discrepancies and inconsistencies specifically that individuals tend to display in different conversations and contexts (and which are not necessarily replicable in an experimental setting) (Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain, forthcoming). Generally speaking, language attitudes are seen as individual evaluations of languages or language use. For the purpose of this dissertation, I expand this definition to include evaluation of literacy and literacy practices as well, as language and literacy are tightly intertwined in the way the participants in my study talked about language and using language, and I will return to this below.

The difference between language attitudes and language ideologies is primarily that language ideologies are a collective set of beliefs, which are held or seen as being held by a group of people. Thus, language ideologies are norm setting, and language attitudes are individual expressions of or against language ideologies. That is to say, the way individuals produce language attitudes in talk can either reinforce the norms as defined by the language

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ideology, or subvert those norms. Language ideologies set out a hierarchy for the kinds of language practices that are considered acceptable or not, and are connected to the constraints Miller (2012) and Pennycook (2010) write about regarding what kinds of identity positions might be available in relation to different linguistic practices.

Language attitudes are always interacting with and reacting to language ideologies, which are "sets of beliefs articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived structure and use" (Silverstein 1979: 173). Woolard (1992: 235) adds that language ideologies are "a mediating link between social structures and forms of talk." Individuals position themselves in relation to ideologies and attitudes all the time in interactional contexts. For example, a common language ideology that has dominated the field of linguistics itself is the monolingual ideal, specifically, that using one language at a time is preferable to code-switching, including for multilingual speakers (Levine, 2011). However, research (Clyne, 2003; de Boet et al., 2009) demonstrates that in reality, multilingual speakers code-switch frequently, despite the fact that they might express beliefs in keeping with the monolingual ideology. Another example is how people position themselves in relation to dialects or other non-standard varieties of a given language. Generally speaking, a common language ideology holds that speaking "standard" language is inherently better than speaking dialect or a non-standard variety. However, individual speakers of dialects or non-standard varieties might display positive associations or preferences for speaking the dialect or non-standard varieties. Then again, the same person who displays a preference for the dialect might display a more normative attitude in another context.

I have presented both of the previous examples of language ideologies in particular because they are relevant to the data I will present in this dissertation. LGMs repeatedly position themselves in relation to the monolingual ideal, but the language attitudes they demonstrate are *both* norm reinforcing ("we should speak only one language, but we speak all mixed up"), but also norm contesting ("we are not written text people, we are creative thinkers"). The language attitudes demonstrated by LGMs about Low German especially are complicated and multi-faceted. It is at once a language they identify with very closely, in many ways being their dominant most comfortable language that connects them to family and friends in the LGM community. At the same time, they recognize that others outside the community don't value the language the way they do. Li (2011) calls the interplay between the perceptions of acceptable practice and the actual use of language "translanguaging space," implying "both going between different linguistic structures and systems [...] and going beyond them" (p. 1223). This positioning is connected to how LGMs repeatedly position themselves in relation to their primary language, Low German, regularly relegated to a dialect, or a "low" language in terms of prestige (Cox, 2013: 53), even by service providers who work with the population and speak Low German themselves.

Multiliterac(ies) and identities

For LGMs, languages and literacies are inextricably linked. Literacy practices are a set of linguistic practices that are central to the construction of spaces and the speaking of identities. In the LGM migrant context, the function and construction of literacies shift, because certain literacy practices are legitimized and valued differently, and these constraints have a profound effect on the "self-constituted and ascribed identity positions" (Miller, 2012: 445). Specifically, LGMs navigate the tension between competing ideologies regarding

language and literacy. On the one hand, they have the dominant Anglo-Saxon, text-based Canadian culture, where (at least in Ontario, where this research took place) English is the primary language and text is privileged over other forms of communication. On the other hand, they have the LGM religiously-oriented culture with a hierarchized linguascape that interacts with and creates a tension in the lived experience of LGMs who must navigate these different linguistic systems and associated value systems. I will turn next to a discussion of literacy specifically, outlining the conceptualization of literacy that is important to this dissertation, and how this conceptualization intersects with the previous discussion about linguistic capital.

On a very basic level, literacy is the way in which people give and receive meaning via written word. Many aspects of our lives are regulated and mediated through written language. Historically, the concept of literacy was seen to be primarily a cognitive process, the acquisition of a set of technical skills. This approach was called the "autonomous model" by Street (1983). Moving beyond that concept, Street defined an "ideological model" of literacy, which Pahl and Rowsell (2005) describe as "the way in which literacy is grounded in, how it is used, and how it relates to the power structures within a society." (p. 14).

The notion that literacy is primarily grounded in societal structures necessitates a more nuanced definition of different kinds of engagement with text within these power structures, and so Street (1983), among others, differentiates between "literacy events" and "literacy practices." Heath (1983) defined a "literacy event" as an "occasion where written text and talk around that text constructs interpretation, extensions, and meanings" (p. 19). In other words, a "literacy event" is an individual iteration of a "literacy practice." Street (1995)

specifies that "literacy practices incorporate not only 'literacy event', as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also folk models of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them." (p. 2). Pahl and Rowsell (2005) contemporize this definition in a way that allows for the inclusion of multimodal literacies when they write that "the moment of composing a text can be described as a literacy event, an event in which literacy forms a part. Part of the composing process draws on [an individual's] experience of literacy practices" (p. 9).

For the purpose of my dissertation, I would like to align myself with Larson and Marsh (2005) for whom "literacy events are conceived as occasions where texts (in a variety of forms) are central to participation" and "literacy practices may include literacy events, but also include a larger set of social, cultural, historical and political practices" (p. 131). In the case of LGMs, for example, a common literacy practice is the memorization and recitation of the *Katetjismus* (catechism). Children start this memorization process in school, knowing that they will need to produce the text upon their baptism. During a baptismal service, the preacher or bishop will ask individual questions found in the catechism of the different baptismal candidates, and they must produce the correct answer. The individual iteration of this call-and-response for a particular set of baptismal candidates is a literacy event, one which they have been preparing for since their school days. For LGMs, baptism is central to being able to fully participate in all aspects of colony life. The rite of baptism is seen as central to the *oole Ordnunk* (old order), which in turn governs all aspects of life on the colonies. These historical and cultural factors come into play during individual baptismal services, and already as early as when school children are introduced to the *Katetjismus* as a text.

Leaning on Barton and Hamilton (1998), Larson and Marsh (2014: 19) propose eight principles of New Literacy Studies, and I have highlighted the six that are most relevant to my dissertation[1]:

1. Literacy practices and events are always situated in social, cultural, historical, and political relationships and are embedded in structures of power (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Street, 1995, 1997, 1999).

2. Being literate involves being communicatively competent across multiple discourse communities (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996, 2001). Literacy practices and events are embedded in Discourse (Gee, 1996, 2001; Gee, et al., 1996) and are integrated into people's everyday lived practices on multiple levels (Gee et al., 1996).

3. Literacy practices involve the social regulation of text, that is who has access to them and who can produce them (Barton & Hamilton, 2012: 17; Luke, 1994).

4. Social inequalities based on race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, and so on structure access to participation in literacy events and practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2012).

5. The impact of new information and communication technologies changes the nature of literacy and what needs to be learned (Kress, 2003, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011).

6. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 2001; Street, 1995).

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[1] The additional principle highlighted by Larson and Marsh (2014: 19) is: The changing nature of work also demands a new view of language that is multimodal (Kress, 2010) and more complex than traditional conceptions. The notion of multiliteracies emerges (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In other words, people use different literacy across different domains of life [discourse communities].

7. Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense-making (Barton & Hamilton, 1998).

I have chosen to highlight these principles because of the way in which they intersect with notions of capital and agency outlined earlier in this chapter. These principles further serve to underline the centrality of literacy to any conversation about language.

This conceptualization of multiliteracies links directly to the construction of *Dietsch* space because a majority of the social practices integral to the construction of the space are related to interaction with text in various forms. Bamberg (2005) writes about the importance of "mediating artifacts," such as letters, for example, in the construction of migrant spaces. Pahl and Rowsell (2005) echo the importance of mediating elements in the construction of literacy. Bamberg (2015) argues that certain mediating artifacts, like language use or literacy practices, contribute to the construction of spaces, especially in interconnecting geographically remote locations. He focuses on letters, which are texts that connect individuals in different places, but the concept can also be applied to other mediating elements, such as a radio program, television show, or, I will argue here, text messages.

Chapter 3 Methodological Approaches and Considerations

Introduction

The stories in this dissertation were gathered through eighteen months of fieldwork, and comprise of field notes, focus group interviews, recorded conversations, and individual interviews. In the spring of 2013, I began attending a Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) program in a rural Ontario town in an effort to meet and recruit participants for a pilot study I intended to conduct about LGM language learning experiences. Initially, I had intended to conduct a small pilot study for a conference that I was going to expand to a larger dissertation project on language practices of Mennonites in Latin America. However, it quickly became apparent to me that what I had intended as a pilot study was going to become my dissertation project—both for the time investment I was making, but also for the richness in experiences I began to hear about. I realized that any relationship-building I did with this group of women would need to be a long-term investment, and in order to get past their guards and have them entrust their stories to me, I would need to build relationships with them.

Cultural Considerations

Before beginning my fieldwork, I consulted extensively with service providers who work with LGMs, including those who have lived and worked in Mexico, who are familiar with the challenges and privileges associated with working with LGMs. It was important to me, even at a pilot study stage, to involve service providers as consultants at all stages of the project for a number of different reasons. First, the LGMs tend to be an insular group and

mistrustful of outsiders in general, but of those coming from an academic background in particular. Second, as a result of personal conversations I had had with service providers I already knew before I began my fieldwork, I was aware of university-approved research projects that had been conducted with the LGM population which had resulted in a complicated dynamic within the community and further entrenched the view of researcher-outsiders in a negative way. Third, I wanted to ensure that the results of my study, in addition to making a scholarly contribution, would allow me to share useful information with the service providers who work primarily with the LGM population.

As a result of these factors, I was aware from the first moment that I would need to be sensitive to a number of important considerations if I wanted to build trust and credibility among LGMs. The main considerations that were identified by service providers I spoke with were:

1. Choosing the group of LGMs: Given the time constraints of what I had initially conceptualized as a pilot study, service providers recommended a specific group of LGMs to me that would allow me to integrate most quickly. This group was well-established and, unlike some other groups with a similar focus and function, included a mix of women who were still quite involved in the Old Colony Church, as well as those who weren't. As a result of this history of acceptance of former-Old Colony Church members, the service providers thought that I would likely be successful in getting people to participate in my study, and that the coordinator of the group would be supportive of the effort. Both of these conditions were important for not only my successful integration into the group, but also my successfully gathering useable data

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from them, especially because I was particularly interested in gathering recorded

conversational data.

2. The presentation of my person and my appearance: Modesty in women's dress is

highly valued by LGMs. Women who are members of the church do not cut their hair

and wear it elaborately braided under a head covering. Depending on their colony of

origin, they have a variety of regulations about what their dresses must look like,

including specific number of pleats in the bodice and the height of the shoulder

"puffs." Collar bones and knees must be covered by the dress—in fact, dresses usually

cover all the way up to the neck (Bombardier, 2016). I have short hair, and on a regular

day, wear pants, form-fitting clothes, and jewellery. When I first started meeting with

LGMs, I was conscious about making wardrobe choices that adhered to their

standards of modesty out of respect to them. For example, I wore shirts and sweaters

that had a high cut, fit loosely, and I left all jewellery except my wedding ring at home.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork with this particular group, I worried less and

less about my clothing, but was simply always conscious that I was entering into a

space with people for whom modest self-presentation was important.

3. The drafting of my interview questions: I consulted extensively with service providers

about my interview questions, sharing with them first my overarching research

questions, and my interview questions underwent significant revisions based on the

feedback I received. The initial draft of interview questions I wrote, according to best

practices from oral history, were very open-ended, with the intention to keep from

leading the interviewees into specific answers. However, given that LGMs value

straightforward communication that is kept factual, as one former service provided

who has extensive experience with the LGM community, remarked, the questions were far "too philosophical." I was told that in order to elicit the types of narratives and stories (and just general conversation) I was intending through the interview and focus group discussion process, I would need to be far more specific in my questions. So, for example, rather than saying "What languages do you use on a daily basis? How do you use them?" I would get better results if I specified—"when you are at home, what languages do you speak? What do you speak with your children? What do you speak with your husband?" etc. It was a challenge to draft questions that were much more granular without overly leading the interviewees into specific answers. Based on the literature I had read about LGMs and the feedback from the service providers, I wrote a new set of much more detailed questions that were still open-ended enough to elicit narrative responses (see Appendix C for detailed list of guiding questions).

4. Cultural considerations: Because of the mistrust of outsiders inherent in the LGM community, there is not a large body of literature available about them, and much of that literature is problematic as a result of its perspective. In Mennonite publications, LGMs have been characterized as living in a "vacuum" and "impoverished in every aspect of life" (Braun, 2013; cf. Old Colony Mennonite Support, 2011). On the other hand, as is often the case for conservative religious groups, in other work they are othered and romanticized in an equally unhelpful way, especially in the media, as Janzen (2016) has found. The reality of individuals' lived experiences are of course somewhere between these poles, and it was important to the service providers that I recognize the complexity of individual experiences, while informing me of some of the issues and quirks I should be prepared for. Specifically, they talked about the

importance of humour in the LGM community, especially of a self-deprecating and *schadenfroh* (laughing at another's misfortune) nature.

5. Privilege of written text: Ordinarily when working with human participants, ethics regulations at Canadian universities require interviewees and any participants who are being recorded or studied to complete a written consent form. These documents can often use complicated language which can be difficult to understand and process for even someone with an academic background due to the legalistic nature of the language. As will be discussed at length in this dissertation, interaction with text, especially reading in English, can often be uncomfortable for LGMs. Furthermore, because of the limitations individuals feel they have in terms of reading and writing, I was told that the act of writing their name was a performative act of great importance among LGMs and not to be taken lightly. I was concerned that if I required participants to read and sign complicated documents that it would limit the number of people who would be willing to participate in my study, and result in significant distance between them and me. This was a contentious issue for the Research Ethics Office at the University of Waterloo, but after clarifying the LGM position with them, I was able to secure ethics clearance that allowed participants to give consent orally on a recording following an oral explanation and opportunity to ask questions. This was extremely important to me because of the oral nature of the LGM culture, and the message the oral consent was sending to the participants in terms of characterizing me differently than other researchers who had worked with the population before. I also offered to meet with all participants to read to them and discuss any parts of my dissertation in which they and their stories appear. A frequent response to this offer,

however, was: "I trust you," indicating that they did not feel the need for this kind of

check and balance.

The program of which I became a part has been running for approximately ten years,

conceptualized as a program for mothers of preschool-aged children (as is mandated by

CAPC-funded programs). The group of women who regularly attended this group, and that I

was able to get to know during the course of my fieldwork, was unique among outreach

programs aimed at LGMs, as I was told by a number of different service providers, because

the group included women who are still very involved in the Old Colony Church, those who

are tangentially involved, and those who do not attend the Old Colony Church at all

anymore. This type of constellation is uncommon because of the tendency towards insularity

among those directly connected to the Old Colony Church, and the lack of trust in outsiders.

Data Collection

Over the course of approximately 18 months between April 2013 and October 2014, I

attended more than 50 meetings of the CAPC group, which comprised of more than 150 hours

of observation and note-taking, during which I had countless informal conversations about

all manner of topics. During this time, I visited a number of homes, had some of the group

members over to my home, and had approximately 20 social and organizational telephone

conversations with members of the group. In addition, I was able to audio-record

approximately 4.5 hours of group discussions, 5 individual interviews averaging

approximately 1.5 hours in length, 3 informational interviews with service providers, and one

30-minute informal discussion on Eunice Adorno's (2012) book *Las Mujeres Flores (The Flower

Women)*. This photo book by a Mexican photographer depicts every day scenes from life in

Durango Colony. I brought the book to show them, and the women were extremely

interested, since they recognized many of the subjects, and could relate to the locations and activities portrayed in the book.

Taking a participation observational approach (Musante, 2015), I recorded information about CAPC meetings I attended, including who was in attendance, what the main meal was that was being cooked, and any conversations or observations I felt were of note. I did not write notes during the meetings as I felt this would be disruptive and off-putting, and negatively impact the kinds of conversations I would be able to have with the participants. Instead, I took "head notes" (Musante, 2015), and wrote in more detail afterwards.

I never video-recorded any of the meetings or the interviews or focus groups, as I was told by service providers that video recording would make participants uncomfortable, and would result in lower participation and more work on my end to build trusting relationships with participants. Instead, I audio-recorded individual interviews and focus group discussions using a digital SONY audio recorder. In many ways, it would have been easier to analyze the focus group discussions if they had been video recorded, as there were 12 women present for the first focus group discussion and 13 for the second, and it was sometimes difficult to determine who was speaking at different times. To counteract this difficulty during focus groups, I used a secondary recording app on my IPad to record as a back-up, and so that I would at least have clear audio recordings of all of the conversations that were happening around the table. Additionally, I wrote notes afterwards, including diagrams of seating arrangements and what I remembered about hand and facial gestures that were relevant at different times.

Of note about the focus group discussions is that during those conversations, the women reported realizing that although each of their stories were unique, many of the challenges they experienced individually were experienced by many of the others as well. They told me that although they had never really talked about these experiences with anyone, it was helpful for them to do so (one participant called the focus group a "therapy session"), especially to realize that they had not been alone in their struggles, especially with learning English and with struggling to learn how to read.

The focus group discussions I conducted with the women were large, and at first, participants were hesitant to participate, because the things I was asking about were not things that they tended to talk about on a regular basis. In fact, some of them mentioned how they had never voiced the stories they were telling before, and that they had had no idea that others had experienced the same feelings of fear and frustration. Most of the women who came to Canada and were made to go to school shared the feeling of being alone, carrying the weight of how sinful and wrong it was they were going to school in the first place. Two of the women who participated in the first focus group discussion were sisters who would call themselves fairly close, but even they had never talked about how the experiences they had had in school had *felt*.

I listened to all the recordings carefully several times to identify key excerpts to transcribe in more detail, according to what I wanted to focus on—language-related stories and narratives. In doing so, the categories for the chapters emerged, and I subsequently selected additional excerpts to confirm initial points of analysis. The data were then transcribed using Jeffersonian (2004) transcription conventions (see Appendix A for a glossary of symbols). Some of the data were first transcribed by an undergraduate research

assistant for readability and to gain oversight of the data, but all fine-grained transcription that has been excerpted in this dissertation was done by me.

In addition to narratives about language learning and migration experiences, an initial look at the data demonstrated emerging and recurring themes of literacy in different contexts and experiences with schooling. Based on some of the themes that initially emerged during the first focus group discussion, I used an iterative grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to ask additional questions in the individual interviews to elicit additional narratives about literacy and school experiences.

Using the basic transcripts as a starting point, I coded those transcripts for emerging themes, looking for any patterns or clusters that were immediately apparent. I then worked to establish some broader categories to organize the data, such as school, texting, migration stories, for example. I reviewed the questions I had written in my field notes to see if I could see some answers in the data, connected to any of the clusters or patterns I had identified. I then began re-transcribing some sections of the transcripts that were connected to the identified patterns, such as language learning and teaching. I subsequently conducted a fine-grained analysis of the re-transcribed sections, looking line-by-line at instances of code-switching, verb choices, pronoun use, deixis, and how subsequent turns were linked to one another to connect the emerging themes to constructions of identity and space. In this process, I aimed to take an emic perspective, to listen to the data, in order to analyze what participants made relevant in their conversations and narratives, rather than beginning with pre-determined categories that I wanted to analyze.

As part of the analysis, I also developed strategies to anonymize the participants without impacting the integrity of the data. To begin, I chose culturally-appropriate pseudonyms for the participants. This was not an easy task, given all of my participants were women, and there are not an inordinate number of names that are commonly given to LGM girls. Then, I chose aspects of their biographies to alter slightly, such as changing a child who was a girl into a boy, or adding to or subtracting from the total number of children. Additionally, I made adjustments to the professions of the women's husbands, choosing jobs that were similar in terms of income and capital among LGMs, but changing the details.

Locating myself in the research space

At the beginning of my fieldwork, it was challenging to build relationships with the participants who were still active members of the Old Colony Church. The CAPC participants who had left the church were eager to talk to me, openly sharing their experiences growing up in Mexico, as well as the intricately connected processes they experienced once they came to Canada. They were my cultural brokers, so to speak, helping me to negotiate between the cultural differences and the initial mistrust of the other group members. They included me in conversation, asked me questions about myself that other group members did not ask, and made me feel welcome in a way that allowed me to slowly connect with the other members of the group.

However, it was my own motherhood, when it became real and tangible in the form of my pregnancy and the subsequent birth of my daughter that made me socially legible to the LGM women I had come to know. Before that point, I was simply another researcher, "university girl," who was not *Dietsch* and had been in school for far longer than was reasonable from their perspective. They were surprised, for example, to know that I could

understand and laugh at some of their jokes, the ones told in Low German that the group

facilitator, being of Swiss Mennonite background, couldn't understand at all. I grew up

hearing Low German from my grandmothers, and from my aunts and uncles, although I do

not actively speak it. Once they recognized I could understand them, it first resulted in

guardedness, since they were uncertain about how much I really understood of what they

said. As a part of my fieldwork with this group of women, I repeatedly asked them vocabulary

questions and repeated words and phrases back to them, often to their great delight. It made

a difference to them that I not only understood a lot of what they said, but also that I made

attempts to speak their variety of *Dietsch*, since, as they themselves told me, their Low

German did not tend to be validated by outsiders—"why should we always be the ones to

work so hard to speak English? Why can't someone else try for once?". Eventually, I took up a

role as an inside-outsider, not quite one of them, because I am not and was never directly

connected to the Old Colony Church (and cannot speak Low German fluently), but not quite

the ignorant outsider either.

This insider-outsider status affected my methodology in the following ways:

1. I was acutely aware of the fact that I was speaking with the women in a language that

    was not necessarily their most comfortable language (English), because I am not able

    to code-switch the way they do when I am speaking, although I was able to

    understand them when they did it. As a result of this linguistic limitation, I was not

    able to actively elicit narratives in Low German in an effective way. There are many

    instances of code-switching in the recorded data I have, but in general, when

    participants spoke with me, especially on record, they spoke English as a primary

    language, which of course affects the data, and even the kinds of narratives and

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episodes they would relate, and how they would position themselves within these narratives and conversations.

2. As a result of my consciousness of having more education, different facility with English, as well as a different socio-economic status than most of my participants, I actively sought out opportunities to equal the playing field in my interactions with them. Specific examples include: asking for Low German translations for words and repeating them back to them, asking them to teach me Low German phrases and correct me, and especially asking questions about and deferring to their methods of cooking.

Analytical approaches

Narrative analysis

Personal narratives, that is, when we talk about ourselves and tell stories about ourselves, are what allow us to make sense of our lives and "give [our] lives meaning over time" (Pavlenko, 2007: 164). It could be said that our lives are narratives. Indeed, the oft-quoted Hardy (1968) writes "we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative" (p. 5). As such, unlike the analysis that occurs with any laboratory experiment, the analysis of personal narratives can allow insight into "people's private worlds" (Pavlenko, 164). It is because of these insights that narrative as an object of analysis can offer that have caused narrative to become important in the social sciences in general, and in sociolinguistics in particular as a way of attempting to understand how people give meaning to their lives and establish their identities.

According to de Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012), narrative as an object of study was embraced as "an antidote to rationality and the quantitative measures prevalent in the social sciences at the time as well as a political tool that celebrated lay experience and lay voices and created opportunities for them to be heard and validated" (p. 19). It has since become a legitimate way of researching in history (most notably through oral histories), psychology, sociology, anthropology, education, and even health care (Pavlenko, 2007: 164; de Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012). This change has occurred not least because a turn towards narrative allows for multiple interpretations of the world and breaks away from a paradigm of privileging objective facts over deeply subjective personal experiences (De Fina and Georgakopoulou, 2012: 19). This shift from apparent facts to experiences of individuals further has the effect of shifting the epistemological perspective, and subsequently the entire research paradigm, since it calls for research that is conducted from an emic rather than an etic perspective. Thus, as a direct result of the narrative turn, a new paradigm of participant-driven research emerged.

This paradigm shift towards narrative and towards giving credence to the experiences of individuals further results in a debate about the location of truth, since it is difficult to separate ourselves in the disciplines in which we create knowledge about people from the desire to deal in facts. The narrative turn results in a perspective that privileges the individuals' experiences, and thus, it is clear that "representations [of reality] vary drastically over time, and across circumstances within which one lives, so that a single phenomenon may produce very different stories, even from the same person" (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2008: 5). As such, narrative analysis seeks not only to find meaning, but also to make meaning, a process that is interpretive and subjective, and is thus in distinct opposition

to the fundamental values of scientific research (i.e., reliability, validity, generalizability, etc.). In light of this, researchers in any social science or humanities discipline must question the distinction between fact and fiction, and their own role in the construction and interpretation of "truths" of human experience. However, one of the problems with privileging narrative as a mirror of human experience is the potential assumption that there is some kind of true version of any given story that is somehow possessed by the teller. The core problem here is the assumption that there actually is a true version of the story. If we accept that a narrative epistemology is a valid way of constructing and producing knowledge, then the inherent complexity and multiplicity of perspectives, and more importantly, that these are all valid interpretations, are brought into sharp relief.

So, if there is no so-called "true" narrative that can get at the so-called "truths" of human experience, why do we bother examining it at all? The answer lies in the complexity and the multiplicity of perspectives that I have just mentioned. The fact that there are countless ways of interpreting the world *is* a kind of truth. But that is not to say that there are no commonalities between individual ways of interpreting and making sense of the world, or that all is simply chaos. Making sense of our lives is a process that we undertake every time we talk about ourselves. Additionally, every time we experience something new, we have to incorporate it into our personal narrative, giving past events new meaning, and bringing certain memories to the forefront. In doing so, we situate our narratives, and subsequently our identities, both globally, "by drawing on our cultural knowledge and expectations about typical courses of action in recurrent situations, [and thus constructing] story topics, themes and points [and] we also situate that experience locally [by] verbally [placing] our past experiences in, and [making] them relevant to, a particular 'here' and 'now,' a particular

audience, and a particular set of interactional concerns and interpersonal issues" (Schiffrin, 1996: 168). Doing this is how we assert our subjectivity and eke out our place in the world.

As already mentioned, in sociolinguistics in particular, the analysis of narrative was first introduced by Labov and Waletzky (1967) in their seminal paper "Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience." In this, and later work (cf: Labov, 1972), they proposed an approach to narrative structure, which has arguably become the most influential approach to analyzing narrative in linguistics. Labov and Waletzky (1967) define narrative as "one verbal technique for recapitulating past experience, in particular a technique of constructing narrative units which match the temporal sequence of that experience" (p. 13). They view personal narrative as units of talk or discourse that have a predictable textual structure. These include an *abstract* (essentially a preface indicating the overall point or theme of a particular story), an *orientation* (setting the stage for the action, an indication of who, where and when), the *complicating action* (which addresses "what happened" in chronological order), an *evaluation* (which indicates the significance of the events to the speaker and emphasizes the point of the story), and an optional *coda* (the transition back into regular talk).

Labov's model was influential, and is useful in that it incorporates "affective, emotive, subjective and experiential aspects of narrative," which had traditionally been difficult to grasp or hold onto long enough to analyze (de Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012: 34). In particular, the structural component of evaluation, in which the speaker positions him or herself in relation to the story itself, the content, and other characters, continues to be useful to analysts today, and forms the basis of the narrative analysis I wish to undertake. The model was also useful in bridging the gap between traditionally oral storytelling and literary

storytelling. However, Labov's model has been sharply criticized for a number of reasons. Of particular relevance to my project is the following: Labov almost completely brackets out the interactive, dialogic nature of storytelling as human beings do it, and the model thus makes the attempt to capture the actually dynamic nature of dialogic storytelling (including multiple participants, different contexts of telling, etc.) in a model that is far too rigid for what actually occurs in interaction. Since, according to Labov, narratives are not viewed as interactive, they are seen as discrete entities that can be removed from the surrounding talk, which is also not useful if we are to see narratives as semiotic resources with which identities are constructed. For the purposes of my project, I view narratives and "small stories," or mini-narratives, as Georgakopoulou (2007) has named them, as precisely this—tools that are used to make various aspects of participants' identities relevant at different times during talk, something that occurs primarily discursively.

Conversation analysis

As such, rather than following a Labovian analysis that views the narratives that occur in talk as complete units that can be analyzed as a whole, it is far more fruitful to use a Conversation Analysis (CA) and interactional sociolinguistic (Gumperz, 1983) framework. CA, as initiated by Garfinkel (1967) and Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) and further developed by Schegloff (1968), Schegloff and Sacks (1973), and Schegloff, Jefferson and Sacks (1977) is concerned with the ways in which utterances can be seen as actions, that the seemingly insignificant words or pauses or tones of voice carry meaning and are at the same time "context shaped [and] context renewing" (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990: 289). CA holds that conversation is sequentially structured, and can be analyzed based on linguistic choices interactants make in response to the utterances of others. As Georgakopoulou (2007) writes,

it is through "the 'small' of narrative analysis, [through] focusing on the seeming minutiae, the fine-grained analysis, [and] the prioritising of the communicative *how* as an analytic focus" (emphasis added) that we are able to see the identities emerge that participants construct (p. 2). Rather than simply giving the researcher an overall impression of the ways in which participants understand their identities in a given situation, CA allows for a detailed examination of the linguistic evidence for or against particular interpretations.

Although there are a variety of ways in which identity can be viewed to exist, for my purposes, which are located squarely within a constructivist framework (see chapter 2 for more detailed discussion on constructivism), I view identity as a process of emerging in interaction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2010), that is to say through the ways in which participants position themselves (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion on positioning theory) linguistically in relation to each other, to dominant discourses, and the ways in which they locate themselves in space and time. Identity is a social phenomenon, and a constructivist view of identity brings "its plurality and its interdependence on different levels of contextualization" to light (de Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2012: 156), which then has consequences for the choice of my methodology. It is the "small" aspects of talk, such as *contextualization cues* (Gumperz, 1983) which only really become noticeable through detailed analysis, that serve to bring these ways of positioning to light. Narratives are one of the resources participants have with which to construct their identities and contextualize themselves and their talk in the wider social world.

As I have already mentioned in relation to Labov, I view narratives, and particularly "small stories" as semiotic resources participants use to position themselves. The narratives

themselves can serve to index aspects of local and cultural context, and serve as a bridge

between the then-and-there of the occurrence and the here-and-now of the telling (although

it must be noted that this is by no means a linear or one-to-one relationship). As such,

narratives within talk must be understood as part of talk-in-interaction, and cannot, as Labov

(and others) attempted, be removed from this context. The difference between the monologic

narratives Labov was suggesting in his model and the nature of narratives that are co-

constructed by a number of participants is highly relevant for my project. The largely

monologic narrative Labov proposed does not really exist, not even in an interview situation

that is carefully orchestrated to elicit long stretches of talk from the participant (such as

Labov's were). This is because narratives can change based on the context—who is listening,

where the talk is taking place, what other social and cultural considerations there are. More

specifically, co-participants are always "interacting," even if they are not speaking or

communicating, simply by being together in the same location at the same time (cf: Goffman,

1981).

It is clear that CA and interactional sociolinguistics serve as an analytical framework

for the purposes of my data. They allow for a fine-grained and detailed analysis of linguistic

choices and actions, and provide evidence for claims I might make about how individual

participants construct their identities. Furthermore, it will give me the resources to approach

my data from an emic perspective, examining the categories and ways of positioning that the

participants themselves make relevant. At the same time, however, traditional CA takes all

the evidence for particular claims from the conversational data itself, and I find this to be

potentially limiting, since it is not uncommon for particular stretches of talk to be affected by

a whole range of aspects that may not directly occur in the talk itself but can be hugely

relevant for understanding the interaction in the moment. The balance is between allowing for an emic perspective that is participant-driven while still having room to examine categories or additional ethnographic information that I as the researcher find relevant without, of course, becoming positivistic or deterministic.

Ethnography

A certain amount of ethnographic knowledge is necessary to understand and sometimes even just to recognize the emerging categories. As such, I would align myself with the agenda of linguistic ethnography (Creese, 2008), in order to draw useful aspects out of anthropological traditions, which often lack specific attention to the minutinae of language choices, while at the same time situating interactional sociolinguistics within its social and particularly, its cultural context, in order to better understand the categories that emerge for the participants themselves. Rampton, Tusting, Maybin, Barwell, Creese & Lystra (2004) write that "linguistic ethnography generally holds that language and social life are mutually shaping, and that close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in everyday activity" (p. 2). As such, a linguistic ethnographic "analysis [...] attempts to combine close detail of local action and interaction as embedded in a wider social world" (Creese, 2008: 233). In this dissertation, I aim to take an interactional sociolinguistic approach which borrows analytical tools from CA to analyze co-constructed narratives from a linguistic ethnographic perspective.

Chapter 4 *Onse Lied*: Low German-speaking Mennonites in context

Introduction

To be *Dietsch* is to be part of a collective *we*—a collection of ways of doing and thinking and being that pattern everyday lives and give them meaning. I have chosen to use the Low German words "onse Lied" (our people) to begin this chapter to point to that collective understanding of self. One of the primary considerations in this construction is the interconnectedness between language, education, and work. As Good Gingrich (2016) writes, "Mennonite religion is also a tradition, a history, and a way of life that is grounded in faith or religious beliefs. Belief and daily life practices cannot be separated" (p. 153). Among *Dietsche*, "emphasis is placed on obedience to acceptable practices and behaviour, rather than on private, individual beliefs. In this way, *Dietsch* faith is practical and communal" (Good Gingrich, 2016: 153). At the same time, these everyday lives and the stories *Dietsch* people tell about them to understand and make sense of them are intensely individual. In order to understand the categories that are referenced and oriented to in the following chapters, it first becomes necessary to give a historical background and an overview of cultural considerations.

The Low German Mennonite Story

The women whose narratives, conversations, and experiences you will read about in this dissertation are LGMs, Mennonites who speak Low German as a primary language and carry with them a complicated migration history that spans generations and continents. Quiring (2004) describes them as a "peculiar and colourful people, who in many respects

seem stuck in a bygone age" (p. 85). According to MCC Ontario, there are approximately 40,000 LGMs living in southwestern Ontario today (Steiner, 2015: 483). Some stay for part of the year to pick cucumbers, strawberries, and tobacco, while many of their children go to public school. In the winter months, these families often return to Mexico, back into the arms of their tight-knit communities and regulated village life. Others come to Canada and never look back, boxing up their Low German with their *Düak* (head covering) to embrace mainstream Canadian life. This flexibility of pan-American movement is a direct result of the migration history of their ancestors, which entitles many to Canadian citizenship.

In order to even begin to contextualize and understand the stories of the individual women analyzed in this dissertation, it is necessary first to understand something about the broader context of the LGM experience. In the LGM experience, language has become inextricably linked to faith and education, and in order to understand how these interconnections affect the narratives of the participants in my study, it is important to trace back where the language attitudes and ideologies came from, and how they impact LGM experiences in Canada. Tracing the development of these attitudes and developments takes us back to Reformation-era Europe, and the early Anabaptist movement. Their migration story is one characterized by persecution, both active and perceived, and an ongoing desire to live separately from the world but also to find a place within it.

The beginnings of Anabaptism were founded on fundamental differences from the Roman Catholic Church in the following beliefs:

1) That individual believers could interpret the Bible for themselves (rather than a central church representative);

2) Adults, not infants, should be baptized based on personal conviction and choice;

3) Conflicts should be solved non-violently;

4) Since people should always tell the truth, there should be no requirement to swear oaths.

The name "Anabaptist" is a Greek word meaning "re-baptist," and refers to the second baptism church members experienced when they rejected their infant baptism and joined the movement. When some of the charismatic leaders in the Anabaptist movement first emerged, the Roman Catholic Church, along with governmental forces in Switzerland, where the movement originated, drove the movement underground and out beyond the Swiss borders through systematic persecution, imprisonment and execution of self-proclaimed Anabaptist followers. Similar efforts to stamp out the movement in Austria and Germany drove followers further up the Rhine River into northern Germany and the Netherlands (Smith, 1981: 41).

The term "Mennonite" takes its root from the name of Menno Simons, an influential Dutch Anabaptist leader and former Catholic priest (Dyck, 1993: 102). Used for the first time in the mid-1500s, the term was used only to refer to the Anabaptists who were geographically located in northern Europe, but it eventually came to include southern German and Swiss groups as well, and was used specifically to differentiate Mennonites from the other two remaining Anabaptist groups—the Amish (who take their name from Jakob Amman), and the Hutterite Brethren (who take their name from their founder Jakob Hutter) (Smith, 1981: 73).

As Smith (1981: 73) writes, Mennonites eventually almost all left their countries of origin. The most common migration patterns—one westward and one eastward from Central Europe—are the most common way to differentiate and categorize the very different ways in

which the groups developed and adapted. The westward group, often referred to as "Swiss Mennonites" migrated early on directly to North America, specifically Pennsylvania, at the beginning of the 18th century. These were also the first Mennonites to come to Canada, settling originally in the Waterloo Region of Ontario in the late 18th century (Steiner, 2015: 59). While this group is large, and accounts for a significant portion of the Mennonite population of the Region (Steiner, 2015: 582-584), Swiss Mennonites are not the focus of this dissertation. Instead, this dissertation focuses on the group which moved eastward before they came to North America. Sometimes they are referred to as "Dutch Mennonites," because the Netherlands are thought to be the place where this group originated. Most commonly, however, they are referred to as "Russian Mennonites," because while their Swiss Brethren went directly to North America, this group migrated first through what was formerly Prussia, and upon invitation of Katherine the Great of Russia in 1763, migrated primarily to southern Russia and the Ukraine. In Russia and the Ukraine, these Mennonites established villages and colonies and lived for a number of generations while maintaining their use of Mennonite High German and Low German.

Russian Mennonites, of which the LGMs are a part, did not begin emigrating to Canada until the late 19th century, and are considered to have migrated in three distinct waves—in the 1870s, 1920s, and 1950s (Steiner, 2015). Most LGMs would trace their origins back to the first immigration wave of 7000 migrants from Russia, in the 1870s. The LGMs overall were primarily agrarian without as much education as their Prussian counterparts. Because of their agrarian background, they settled in the prairie provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan after having secured large tracts of land to re-create village life as they knew it in Russia, as well as significant concessions related to education, military service and religious

freedom (Regehr & Thiessen, 2011). At the time, they were actively looking for a place to relocate to because of the forced military conscription that had been enacted in Russia, which went against what they had been promised by the empress when they first chose to put down roots in Russia.

This group of migrants is characterized by their religious conservatism, viewing their separation from the world, based on the teaching to be "in the world, but not of the world" (John 17:16), and the imperative not to "conform any longer to the pattern of this world" (Romans 12:2) to be of paramount importance in establishing their lives on a new continent. The group I refer to in this dissertation as LGMs became known as *Old Colony*, referring to their colony of origin in Russia, the Chortiza colony, the first colony founded in Russia, to differentiate from the New Colony (Molotschna) (Loewen, 2013: 9). The Old Colony Mennonites accomplished the separation from the world through maintenance of a different language, a separate education for their children, as well as establishing villages and colonies that allowed them to live in geographic separation from mainstream society. Initially, the Canadian government was very happy to make accommodations, because they were looking to populate vast stretches of prairie, and Mennonites had developed a reputation for their skill as farmers, developing sophisticated irrigation systems in Prussia, and effectively managing large tracts of land in Russia (Krahn & Sawatsky, 2011).

While the Government of Manitoba had already passed legislation requiring English to be taught in provincial schools when LGMs arrived in the 1870s from Russia, it was not until the School Attendance Act was passed in 1916 that the Mennonite colonists began to feel governmental pressures in their daily lives (Good Gingrich, 2016: 150). While attending

private schools was not prohibited by this bill, which was primarily aimed at the

Francophones who were maintaining French language education through their own schools,

the government began to strictly inspect and regulate private school education. Private

schools not adhering to government-issued standards were replaced with (English language)

public schools with compulsory attendance, and parents who did not send their children to

these schools were fined or jailed (Good Gingrich, 2016: 150). Many Mennonite schools used

Mennonite High German as the language of instruction, and therefore did not meet the

standards set out by the government, resulting in those schools being shut down. This

infringement on the rights that Mennonite colonists had been promised was perceived as

another kind of persecution, and so scouts were dispatched to the United States, Mexico, and

Paraguay to determine whether there might be more flexibility available to them there. This

eventually resulted in the relocation of between 7000-8000 Old Colonists to Mexico in 1922

(Loewen, 2013: 40).

   In Mexico as in Canada, Mennonites sought to re-establish the village life they had

known in Russia. The Mexican President at the time, Alvaro Obregón, had granted them what

became known as the *Privilegium* (political document outlining privileges for Mennonites

migrating to Mexico), which guaranteed freedom of religion and education, and freedom

from military service and swearing of oaths (Loewen, 2013: 30). In fact, these were the same

privileges that had drawn them from Europe first to Russia, and then to Canada. In addition,

the Mexican government granted them large tracts of land primarily in the state of

Chihuahua in northern Mexico, and the State of Durango, a bit further south (Krahn &

Sawatzky, 1990). Eventually, they would also be granted smaller pockets of land in other

places such as Campeche and Coahuila (Krahn & Sawatzky, 1990). In Mexico, LGMs

established villages that were nearly identical in style and structure to those they had left behind in Canada and Russia—one long central main street, a meeting house and a school house, with fields all around them. As they had in Russia and Canada, LGMs maintained a primarily agrarian lifestyle.

Initial settlement in Mexico proved challenging, as the Mexican climate was significantly different from their experiences in Canada and Mexico, and the methods of irrigation they had perfected, and crops they had carefully selected, failed. The economic hardship, combined with typically large family sizes soon resulted in significantly stratified communities. This experience was again very similar to their experiences in Russia, where some community members were very wealthy, whereas others could scarcely feed their families.

Repeating a previous immigration pattern, in an effort to get out of the cycle of poverty, the poorer families first began to return to Canada in large numbers as seasonal workers in the 1950s, a move which was fairly easy since they still retained Canadian citizenship, and so had access to governmental social support. This mobility proved problematic for community leaders in Mexico, who were concerned about the loss of control over those community members. Initially, community members returned to Mexico when picking seasons were over, but even in poverty, the standard of living in Canada (including free health care, availability of running water and other amenities) was so much higher than in Mexico that it did not take long for families to put down roots in Canada and stop returning to live in Mexico (Steiner, 2015).

Loewen (2013) highlights the differences between the group migration from Canada to Mexico, and the "haphazard" return migration, noting

> this migration northward, however, was more difficult than the migration southward in another respect, for it entailed a sharp break with the very goals of the first emigrants from Canada in the 1920s. It marked an abandonment of the dreams of the migrants' parents and grandparents. Mid-century, heady Canada marked a new frontier, not one of forest or prairie sod, but of wage labour, religious pluralism, English schools, and lives in featureless bungalows well removed from the homes of other migrants; life here was strange and often socially alienating. The move, after all, spelled a sharp separation from family networks and close-knit church life in the South (p. 151-152).

In an effort to stem the flow of migrants from their colonies, community leaders built on the conceptualization of Canada as a place of sin, requiring community members returning to Mexico after sojourns in Canada to publicly acknowledge and apologize for their sinfulness during the *Donnerdach* (Thursday) disciplinary community meetings, and practicing the ban if community members did not comply, or if they brought back artifacts from Canada, such as watches, cars, or similar "worldly" possessions (Steiner, 2015: 439). Canada was framed as a place that was in the grips of a process of secularization, as well as a place that had grossly encroached on Old Colony religious freedom, and was therefore to be feared and avoided. This characterization extended to people who came from or were returning from there. This position grew out of the desperation to remain separate and maintain controllable boundaries for the community. This construct worked well for a time

for one simple reason, identified by theologian Schroeder (1999)—the Old Colony Mennonite

theology is based on the principle of Christian formation, and the lack of certainty about

salvation, which makes actions and behaviour, of "doing the right thing," of central

importance in securing an afterlife (p. 47-48). Thus doing what the community leaders tell

you to do, to strive to be a "good Mennonite," is really the only recourse a faithful person has.

As Steiner (2015) notes, however, a result of the leadership intertwining migration

with salvation, was that a majority of LGMs who came to Canada intentionally had no

religious affiliation at all--in fact, Steiner estimates that more than 60% of LGMs are not only

no longer connected to the Old Colony Church, but to no church whatsoever. As he writes,

> Those leaving for Canada had no religious support from the communities they left,
>
> since the leadership in Mexico saw the negative impact of those who left on the
>
> community that remained. Some of those who left were already on the margins of
>
> the communities because of their desire to access greater technology, a different
>
> religious experience, or simply greater economic opportunity in Canada (p. 488).

Interestingly, the group of women I got to know all still attend church, although not all of

them attend an Old Colony Church anymore, and the lives they have built in Canada are

significantly different from those they would have built in Mexico. In the next section, I will

introduce two women in more detail—Neta, who remains a part of the Old Colony Church,

and Greta, who is no longer a part of the Old Colony Church. I am starting with them because

they both played different kinds of leadership roles in the group overall and thus had a

significant impact on group dynamics. They share similar migrant experiences, similar

difficulties in learning English and finding their way in Canadian society. At the same time,

they are also very different from one another in terms of how they position themselves in the *Dietsch* space, and what kinds of positions are even available to them, given the choices they have made in their lives.

Neta

If you ask Neta who she is, there are a couple of things she will probably say. First, she will mention that she is a mother. She loves each of her seven children—two girls and five boys—and is fiercely proud of their accomplishments. Henry can run fast, for example, and Annie is learning French at school. Lydia has recently mastered perfect *Schmaundküake* (cream cookies), and little Abram and Jakob, the twins, are racing each other down the driveway on their tricycles. John wants to try skating in the winter, and Neta's having trouble getting Peter to go to bed in the evenings because he is reading all the time.

She will likely also talk about her husband, Henry, who is an *Ältester* (elder) in the Old Colony Church, and who works in a machine shop owned by another Old Colony man. She will talk about their partnership—he working to earn money for the family, she cooking and cleaning and making sure the kids behave. She will laugh her great big belly laugh when she talks about their recent (childfree!) adventure driving to a creation museum in the southern United States, where they were attending a conference. How strange it was to be away from the kids for so long and how much they laughed.

She will talk about the changes that the two of them are lobbying for to try to make Old Colony Sunday School accessible to their kids, and she might talk about how painful this process has been and how they have been threatened with excommunication for suggesting that children talk about Bible stories in Sunday School instead of copying out sections of the

catechism in script they are unable to read. She will talk about the important role the Old

Colony Church, and thus the Old Colony community, plays in her life, and the sadness it has

caused her to feel at odds with it.

She will also talk about Canada, and Mexico, and how grateful she is that she lives

here now and can provide a different life for her children than Mexico could provide. They

don't go back to Mexico very often, maybe once every seven years—only her oldest children,

Henry and Peter, have ever been to Mexico, because everyone else is here now, in Canada. In

Mexico, everything is forbidden, she might say, but here, she can talk about things like

periods with her daughters, and where babies come from, and she knows that her children

can continue going to school, even if her mother-in-law doesn't really approve. "If you don't

ask her," Neta might say, with her signature belly laugh, "she can't tell you no." She wants her

children to know how to read, so they can learn Bible stories, and learn more about the world

they live in. She will tell you proudly that her children know the Bible better than she does,

actually, and that they can read so fast. "We know that already, Mom, we know that."

Neta came to Canada from Mexico as a young teenager, and she might talk about how

difficult that was for her, as there was only one other *Dietsch* family in their village, and she

spoke no English—the world was terrifying for her and her sister, with whom she was in one

class. She felt belittled, stupid, because she had to go back to school, and was rendered

voiceless by her shame at not speaking English very well. She coloured pictures, and sewed

costumes for Christmas pageants that made her think the world was ending. There were no

explanations. "It was hard," she might say, which doesn't even begin to capture the struggle of

becoming she experienced when she came here—the struggle of adjusting to the new life in

Canada with the chant of "sinner, sinner" ringing in her ears, as she tried to make sense of her own existence in an environment where everything was strange. She can laugh about it now, but it was no laughing matter then.

She will also talk about how speaking a different language than your children makes the relationship complicated. Sometimes she is trying to tell them something and they don't know her words and she doesn't know theirs. "What does that mean, Mom?" they say, and she feels frustrated when she can't answer them. Even though she speaks Low German, English, and some Mennonite High German, these moments of not knowing make her feel stupid, language-less. She and her husband have sought out Low German language resources—Bible stories read on tape, sermon series on a little computer; she has even taught herself, painstakingly, to read Low German, using the Low German Bible next to the English language one.

She will probably talk about these things while her hands are kneading *Tweeback* (bun) dough, with flour dusting her elbows, and all down the front of her embroidered *Schaldüak* (apron). She doesn't think there is anything remarkable about her or her story, any reason to ask her questions about her life, and yet, when you do, the answers are thoughtful, reflected, the musings of a wise woman whose experiences span vastly different continents, languages, and theological foundations.

Greta

Greta was sixteen, newly married, and didn't speak a word of English when she came to Canada. She will tell you about this experience if you ask—how difficult it was, how lonely. She worked at a factory sewing buttons when she first came. If you ask her who she is, Greta

will think about it for a while, and then tell you that she is two halves of a whole, a *Dietsch* half and a Canadian half. She doesn't wear the *Düak* (headscarf) anymore, hasn't been a member of the Old Colony Church for two decades. If you ask her about that, she will tell you how painful that experience was, the leaving of it, the cleaving apart of herself. Greta might say that she was never a good Mennonite in Mexico, that coming to Canada gave her the freedom to be herself in a way that Mexico didn't allow her, a freedom she relished while all the while burning with shame.

Greta will talk about how split she has felt—divided into parts of herself, having "put away" the Low German part because she thought that was necessary for life in Canada. She will also talk about realizing that her attempts at compartmentalization didn't work, that she learned she needed to be all of herself to feel whole, including the Low German part, even if she was no longer part of the Old Colony Church.

To be all of herself, she will say, she left the husband who had brought her to Canada, cutting the final tie to the life she left behind in Mexico. It was a scandal, of course, and her mother didn't approve, but that changed when she met another man who also had connections to the LGM community. She will tell you with pride about their son and daughter—Kaylee and Zachary, who are in junior high, and beginning to assert their independence. They are not much younger now than she was when she came to Canada. It was in part because of the kids, she will say, that she realized that speaking Low German at home was important.

Low German, she will explain, is important for her because it connects her to her family in Mexico, to her mother, to her brothers, and to her sisters, the ones who move back

and forth every couple of years and just can't decide where to plant their hearts without leaving a part of themselves behind. She will talk about how important the language is for the relationship between her mother and her children, so they can talk to her when she visits each spring. She might talk about how embarrassed she felt the first few times her mother visited, with her *Düak* and her pleated polyester dress with big flowers on it. How different she looked, how people stared.

She will also talk about the part of herself that is in Mexico with all the rest of her family, if you ask her, and you can see that this talking about it scrapes at her heart, this separation. That there is still something about Mexico and about the guttural language of her family that calls to her. In Low German, the word "to explain" is "enndietsche," or literally, to "make into German." There is a poetry here—that in explaining, in speaking, things become *Dietsch*. That speaking itself does this, and that as a result, somehow, it is not possible to speak outside of this view of the world. This is who she is, she might say. She tried to pack the Low German up, like it didn't matter, but this failed, attempt after attempt, until she realized she could be Canadian and *Dietsch*, that the two are not mutually exclusive.

She will talk about taking her children to Mexico, will beam with pride when she describes how much her children love it there, how connected they feel to their colony relatives, and how they don't struggle the same way she did to unite the parts of themselves that matter. She will talk about how they speak English, mostly, and even French from school, but also Low German, how they understand that. Greta will tell you this with her fingers curled around a large double double, long fingernails shimmering purple to match her leopard print sweater. She's got a *Schaldüak* on too, that her mother embroidered with

meticulous pink and green flowers. She's got flour on her elbows too, and when she tips her head back to laugh, her hoop earrings jangle.

She works with the LGM community now, managing a local chapter of a government dental initiative that provides free dental care for children. Precisely because of who she is, she can reach across the distance between the LGM *Jemeentschaft* and Canadian society— despite her hoop earrings and her purple nail polish, when she opens her mouth and the familiar Durango vowels spill out, the people are at home with her, recognizing she is one of them, despite everything.

Participants: The Group

The Canadian Action Plan for Children (CAPC) group of which I became a part met every Tuesday morning to cook together. The group was initially conceptualized as an English language learning opportunity for local LGM women. A number of such English-as-a-second-language (ESL) classes exist locally, and the teachers in these programs tend to have knowledge of cultural considerations and some even speak Low German fluently themselves. The original members of the "Tuesday Ladies," however, were not interested in a formal English class. They wanted the opportunity to *do* something, and so it was decided that they would plan to cook together, learn about nutritional principles or ways of adjusting some of their traditional high carb/high fat recipes with alternative ingredients, and do so in English. Childcare was provided, and because participants almost always brought a complete meal home from the group, even husbands who might otherwise object to their wives' going out to socialize accepted Tuesday as part of the way things were.

There was a core group of women who attended when the group was founded, only a few of whom still attended at the time I got to know the group. Some core members had moved away, either to Mexico, or to another part of Ontario, and some of the women's children had aged out of the program, having started school, and so the women did not come anymore either. I met a number of these "program graduates" throughout my 18 months of fieldwork, as some of them came back to take part in the focus group discussions I hosted as part of my research project, or visited if they happened to be in town on a Tuesday. Interpersonally, the group tended to get along fairly well, despite the fact that they represented all manner of involvement with the Old Colony Church, something that in many other contexts would result in conflict and ostracizing especially those individuals who had left the church. While there were sometimes disagreements, and even heated discussions about aspects related to church culture, these did not result in serious conflict or marginalization in this particular group.

Before continuing with more detailed descriptions of the LGM women who regularly attended the CAPC group, I will first describe the group facilitators, who were the ones who coordinated and allowed for such a unique group to form and flourish, despite differences in philosophy and religious conservatism. The official group leader, who is paid to organize and run the group, is Julie, a woman of Swiss Mennonite background who is married to a Mennonite pastor, with extensive experience in mission work in a variety of European and East Asian countries. She is a warm, caring person with a ready laugh, and it was immediately clear to me from the first time I attended the group that the participants love Julie and trust her implicitly.

Rita is one of the volunteers who works with the CAPC group, and has been working with this group since it began. She has no connection to the Mennonite church, but was first introduced to LGMs in her work as an elementary school teacher, where she worked in schools with large populations of LGM children; she is now retired. She is knowledgeable about language issues, speaks multiple languages fluently and has lived in a number of places throughout her life, including big cities such as Montreal and New York. She has a special relationship with a number of the women, having taught them how to read in individual tutoring sessions, and a deep understanding for the issues that affect the LGM population, most notably the difficulty of maintaining a home language that does not have a large variety of print materials to support it. I had many extensive conversations with Rita about her experiences with the LGM population. Rita's outspokenness sometimes caused tension with some of the group members, especially those who did not like to be called out on their strong opinions.

The women who attended this CAPC group were predominantly from the Durango and Zacatecas areas in Mexico. Previously in this chapter, I outlined where Mennonite colonies are located in Mexico, and it is important to note that the women who took part in my study clearly oriented strongly to their specific place of origin in Mexico, and positioned themselves as different from other LGMs who were from a different place in Mexico. Here in Canada, because of the different clusters in which LGMs have tended to settle, the groups get somewhat mixed, whether they are from Zacatecas, Chihuahua or Durango, but the allegiance to the place they originally came from is often significant. Before I began my fieldwork, I had had most of my exposure to colony life in Mexico in the Chihuahua area. That is where my family visited, and also where many of the partners (Mennonite Central

Committee, Radio Menonita, etc.) with which I was familiar are located. The women in my study made clear delineations, however, pointing to differences in language ("their Low German sounds funny to us"), differences in dress and theological interpretation.

In order to better understand and contextualize the analysis in the following chapters, it is important for me to describe the other key players in the CAPC group in addition to Neta and Greta, who are co-tellers of the stories, and the keepers and sharers of the cultural knowledge I am writing about in this dissertation. There were a number of women who attended the group regularly, and they are the ones I will describe next.

Patty and Susch

Perhaps the most outspoken member of the group is Patty. Having left the Old Colony Church, she takes a strong stance against the LGM population. At the same time, she regularly attended the CAPC group with her sister Susch. She was often the cause of tension in the group, both between herself and Rita, or other group members. As mentioned, Patty is no longer part of the Old Colony Church—she is vocal and at times angry about the ways in which LGMs talk about themselves, and the ways in which they "limit themselves" by continuing to use Low German. In response to the question "When do you use Low German?" in one of the focus group discussions, Patty quickly jumps in to say that the only time she uses Low German is to have fun and joke with her sister. Low German, for Patty, is a backwards language, a relic of a backwards culture she ostensibly wants nothing to do with.

I found Patty's repeated and vocal positioning as not-Old Colony, as Canadian, as clinging to the national identity afforded to her by her nationality, and the subsequent rejection of her ethnic and cultural heritage to provide a fascinating tension given the fact

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that she regularly attended a group meeting that was intended for new(ish) immigrants to Canada, all of whom are LGM women, and many of whom still actively participate in the Old Colony Church. Patty talked to me about how she is frustrated that many women connected to the Old Colony Church perceive themselves as victims, and often became openly irritated with linguistic gaffes made by other group members who were less secure in their English language skills.

She positioned herself as often as possible in as close relation to me as she could—that we were the same, fluent in English, "just Canadian," rather than Mennonite or *Dietsch*. This was a tension I felt throughout the second focus group discussion (Patty and Susch were not attending the group for a time when I conducted the first focus group discussion), because Patty was dominant and vocal about her negative feelings and associations with Low German and Old Colony culture, positioning herself as an expert on both Old Colony culture as an insider, as well as broader Canadian culture.

The amount of negativity that Patty expressed, and the clarity of the lines she drew between herself and the "Old Colony", positioning the other group members, or those who identify as LGM as decidedly "other," was for me in direct juxtaposition with her faithful attendance at the CAPC group. I was never able to ask her the question so baldly, but I was very curious as to why, if she wanted nothing to do with the LGM community, she continued regularly attending a meeting of women who *were* LGM, most even proudly so. I never got a satisfying answer. I asked Julie and Rita about it, because they had known Patty longer than I had, but it was Greta who had the most insightful response, after the second focus group discussion when Patty had antagonized some of the other women. Greta herself struggled for

a long time with the pieces of herself, as she calls them—the Low German piece and the Canadian, the other piece. She thought for a long time she couldn't be both, but when she realized that she was both, and learned to embrace that, things became a lot easier for her. Patty, she figured, just hadn't gotten there yet.

Justina

Justina has eight sisters, all of whom live in close proximity to her parents. Justina wanted desperately to go to school when the family first came to Canada, but her parents did not allow her to do so. Since her father is an Old Colony bishop, he was very concerned about how his actions and those of his children would be perceived. For example, Justina's sister has been in Canada as long as she has, but can't understand English. Justina loved the ESL class she enrolled in, loved practicing her English in the bakery where she worked when she first moved to Ontario, and was sorry to give it up when her children were born. Later on, Justina worked with Rita to learn how to read and write English. Justina is proud of her English language skills, of how hard she's worked to acquire them, and of what they represent in terms of her being a successful adult member of broader Canadian society. While in her daily life, Justina positions herself at the centre of the overall *Dietsch* space, she simultaneously positions herself at the periphery of the much narrower *Dietsch* space her family inhabits in Manitoba. Living in Ontario, she misses her family and the closeness with her sisters, but she also talks about the freedom and flexibility she has precisely because she is physically separated from them and therefore not being governed by her father's wishes.

Justina moved to Ontario when she got married at 16, to be closer to some of her husband's family. When she first moved to Ontario, she chose to be less involved in the Old

Colony Church, and even experimented with changing how she dressed, including wearing pants and uncovering her hair. She had her first son fairly early, and struggled to get pregnant a second time. She had three boys, and became pregnant with a daughter during my fieldwork—this was a bonding opportunity for us, as I was also pregnant with and gave birth to a daughter during the time I was conducting my fieldwork. Justina and I became friends during my work with the CAPC group, and I was invited to her home a number of times, and she came to mine with her younger children.

Justina learned how to read English as an adult under Rita's tutelage, which she is very proud of. Before learning how to read English, Justina would have described herself as knowing how to read, but was astonished at the world that opened up for her when she was not only able to recognize the sounds that she should be producing when she saw certain letters in combination, but when she actually understood the content of what she was reading. This experience was hugely empowering for her, and helped her to feel like a competent adult. Her positive association with English, and her facility with the literacy practices in the language are what affect the choice she makes to use English to approximate Low German when she texts or writes (cf. chapter 7). Since learning how to read English, Justina has made a significant effort to learn how to read Low German, but has felt frustrated because the spelling is different everywhere—it's different in the Bible than in the books she has.

Irma

When I first met Irma, she had pink streaks in her spiky hair, and large tattoos of her children's names on her arms. Her stories were a quick staccato, providing glimpses into her

experiences of displacement and loss. Her most recent loss was the disintegration of her marriage and the subsequent fall out in her family and among the *Dietsch* people she is connected to. Despite the fact that her family had been excommunicated from the Old Colony Church when she was a child because of her father's progressive ideas, the disapproval of the community at the collapse of her marriage was troubling to her. Greta, having gone through a similarly difficult process when her first marriage fell apart, was a consistent support for Irma, and the two of them became mediators for me, the insider-outsiders that still had a love and respect for the Old Colony community, while being able to reflect on the community and its members from a distance.

Despite (or maybe because of) the difficulties she was experiencing, however, while I was getting to know her, Irma, who had only ever finished sixth grade between her family's moves from Mexico to Paraguay to Canada, was studying hard for her GED so she could apply to an esthetician program at a local college. She was taking private lessons with a tutor to help her prepare for the exams, and the development of her self-confidence when she passed one exam after another was marked. She was so proud of herself when she passed the written language portion of the GED, and brought the certificate to show me. When she failed the math exam, though, she was completely crushed, worrying she would never fulfill her dream of getting the GED and being able to get into the college. So Rita and her husband stepped in with tutoring and support, so that she finally passed the math exam in the summer. The CAPC group doesn't meet during the school break because there are so many more children at home, but Irma texted me when she passed "I did it!". As a result of her enrollment in the college program, Irma did not attend the group regularly during the majority of my fieldwork,

although we kept in touch via text and Facebook, and she still saw Greta fairly often, as they lived close to one another.

Aggie

Aggie had long red hair always tied back in a braid, with a small black head covering that looks different from the traditional Old Colony headscarf. She always wore skirts, but they were mostly denim, unlike the usual Old Colony pleated polyester florals, because she is an active member of the *Kleine Gemeinde* church, rather than the Old Colony Church.[2] Her triplet girls were in school already, and her little son was the one she brought to the CAPC group. Aggie was lonely, she told me, because the group was the one thing her husband permitted her to attend during the week—often they didn't even go to church because he didn't want to go, but insisted that he not be left alone and did not allow her and her children to go without him. When they were first married it was different, she explained. An injury had completely changed their family life, and left them having to try to find their way back to one another. Though often quiet, Aggie is quick to laugh.

Trudi

The newest member of the group was Trudi, a soft-spoken mother of seven children ranging in age from eighteen months to fourteen years, who brought her toddler daughter to the CAPC group. When I first met her, she had been in Canada for three months, although as I discovered later, she had spent parts of her childhood in the picking fields of the Niagara Region, which explained to a degree how good her English was. With a wonderfully infectious

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[2] Another common church affiliation among LGMs is the *Kleine Gemeinde* church. *Kleine Gemeinde* tend to be less conservative in certain regulations about community life than the Old Colony Church. Old Colony members who are excommunicated are often accepted for church membership into the *Kleine Gemeinde*. (Sawatzky, 1971: 302).

laugh, Trudi took a while to begin speaking to me, but became one of my most fervent Low German teachers, patiently repeating the words for potato, onion, flour, and butter until I could produce the sounds to her satisfaction. The first try often elicited peals of laughter, and I think she liked just hearing me try for her own amusement.

When she did begin sharing about her own experiences, it was to talk about how difficult her eldest daughter was finding the move to Canada—how she missed her school and her friends, missed feeling competent and not different from everyone else. Her children's education was one of the primary motivators that brought Trudi and her family to Canada in the first place. Although Trudi herself grew up Old Colony, she and her husband made the choice to leave the Old Colony Church when they had children so that they could attend Blumenau, the General Conference Mennonite school. Here her daughter had been receiving a bilingual education—Mennonite High German and Spanish, with English as an additional subject, but while she had excelled in English class in Mexico, she explained that it had not prepared her for full days in English with English native speakers. They were working on English together, Trudi said.

There were a number of other women who appear in the data but were not regular attenders of the CAPC group. Eva, Neta's younger sister, moved away before I began my fieldwork, but was a part of the first focus group discussion. Katharina, Justina's sister-in-law, was a part of the second focus group discussion, and although she did not attend the group, I spent time with her when I visited Justina, as she was often there as well. Anita, Greta's sister, attended the group briefly, and although she did not participate in the focus group discussions that form the primary basis for this dissertation, I did conduct an individual

interview with her before she returned to Mexico with her family. Nellie and Bettie are sisters who did not attend the group regularly, although Bettie had attended before she moved away. They participated in the second focus group discussion.

Emerging Themes

I had many conversations, and observed many interactions between the LGM women. During these conversations, both the more formal focus group discussions and individual interviews, but also during the informal conversations that occurred naturally, there were a number of themes that emerged about language and language use. The approach I took to analyzing the data was shaped by the themes that the participants themselves drew my attention to and came back to again and again. These themes included language use and attitudes about language use, as well as the importance of literacy. What cut across these themes related to language is the importance of who was using the language and where (ie., in what location) they were using the language. I will discuss a few of these complexities below.

LGMs and Language

Low German is an important language for the LGMs, in part because it helps them define who they are. The language is inextricably connected to their sense of self, their sense of belonging, and it is a vital connection to their heritage and their families. Cox (2013) describes the unique development of the LGM linguascape that is found in Mexico and Latin America in LGM colonies as follows:

> [it is] stable, intergenerational multilingualism involving three languages, each
>
> occupying largely distinct domains of use within the speech community. Abstractly,

this triglossia can be represented as involving a 'high' variety (H), which is restricted

in use to 'prestige' contexts within the community (e.g. education, religion, written

communication). This variety is superordinate to a 'low' variety (L), which serves as

the means of communication in common, less formal contexts within the community

(e.g. day-to-day in-group communication). Both of these community-internal

varieties, maintained through local institutions and in-group acculturation, are

distinguished from one or more community-external varieties (E), which serve in

communication between members of the community and outsiders, with competence

in these languages varying across individuals (p. 53).

Cox describes the situation in Mexico and Latin America, where the division between LGM

and "community-external" is more clearly drawn than in Canada. In Canada, the relationship

between the different languages becomes more complicated because there is more contact

with community-external varieties required to function in daily life. As can be expected, this

results in more language mixing and a shift in what constitutes acceptable language practices

as compared to Mexico, both in terms of family internal contexts, as well as for LGMs overall.

The mixing process is complicated because the learning of English has historically

been seen as representing a yielding to secular and "worldly" ways. Integrating English as a

part of their mixed code, the language the participants in my study often use with their

children, is therefore problematic, because it is an integration of this sinfulness, an

acceptance of change, which is so antithetical to Old Colony theology. *Dietsche* people talk

about feeling divided, caught in what Good Gingrich (2016) calls the "double binds of

contradictory social spaces" (p. 177). English is essential for functioning and engaging with the

Canadian world, and at the same time, is associated with the sinfulness of change. She goes on to explain

> The Plautdietsch language is a vital expression of an enduring faith-tradition, separation from the world, and cultural identity. An inherited language holds "everything which belongs to the art of living, a wisdom taught by necessity, suffering, and humiliation" (Bourdieu, 1984, 394). Parents demonstrated and described a deep ambivalence about preserving and transmitting their traditional way of life, especially their traditional language, to their young children (p. 178).

Good Gingrich's (2016) findings were no different than my own in that over and over again, my participants repeated this "double bind"—wanting to give their children enough of their language (Low German) to connect them to their heritage, while recognizing that their children felt more at home in a language (English) that still had decidedly negative associations.

In Mexico, the division and segregation is more clear-cut, because LGMs live in geographical vicinity to one another, on colonies and in villages with other LGMs. Many never learn much Spanish, particularly women, because they do not need to. Their lives are bordered by the outskirts of their villages. In Canada, this kind of segregation becomes impossible, because members of the LGM community live interspersed with a variety of other Mennonite groups (many of whom they have never previously encountered), as well as other more mainstream, secular, English-speaking Canadians, with whom they are neighbours and with whom their children go to school. In many cases, their children speak English better than they do any other language, and the linguistic acculturation process that the LGMs

undergo is not unlike the process experienced by other migrant groups (cf: Valdés, 2001; Fishman, 2001). What is different for them, however, is the religious tension they experience due to this linguistic acculturation process. While other migrants lament their children no longer speaking their heritage language and therefore becoming disconnected from their heritage culture (cf: Oh & Fuligni, 2010; Qin, 2006; Wong-Fillmore, 1991), LGMs have the added complication of fearing for their very salvation the more English encroaches on their lives.

Although many LGMs, especially women, do not formally learn Spanish when they live in Mexico, Spanish is a part of their language experiences nonetheless. The presence of Spanish words in Low German was something I had discussed with the participants on a variety of occasions, because LGMs do not generally recognize that their Low German contains constituents from a variety of languages that map the migration history of their community—including Dutch, Russian, English, and Spanish. I speak some Spanish, and so can sometimes identify that a loan word comes from Spanish. My previous exposure to the Low German spoken by my grandparents, who were post-war immigrants to Canada, allowed me to identify many Russian loanwords as well, and when I first talked about that with the women in the group, they were surprised that Low German contained loan words from a variety of different languages. For them, it had always just been *Dietsch*, and they seemed never to have thought about its history or where different words came from before.

In Mexico, Low German is an important language in the LGM community, since LGMs conduct virtually all family and community affairs in Low German. The only higher status

language is Mennonite High German₃ or "Huuchdietsch", which is the official language of church and school. The characterizations of "High" and "Low" are oriented to as value judgements, connecting "high" with prestige and culture, and "low" with low prestige and every day; this characterization is not uncommon among Mennonites (cf: Cox, 2013; Loewen, 2013). However, since Low German is oriented towards so strongly for the purpose of self-construction and self-identification, this stratification is complex already in Mexico, where Low German has a high status in the community relative to Spanish, for example, which is the dominant language in Mexico. The language hierarchy falls apart, however, once LGMs migrate to Canada. There are a number of reasons for this. First, Low German does not have a uniform orthography or grammar, and there are few print resources written in the language to regulate and legitimize it. Second, Canada is a country that privileges written text over other linguistic representations (Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008). As a result, Low German is a low status language, except within the LGM community itself, where the negotiation of who is at the centre or the periphery of membership categories is of central importance.

Language and Gender Roles

The centre of the *Dietsch* space is characterized by living the "right way," which is in part maintaining a particular way of life and living out a particular set of values. This is how religious faith is lived out. LGM women see themselves as being primarily responsible for raising their children to be fully participating members of the LGM community, which means ensuring they have the language, religious education, and values they need to occupy central

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₃ Like Cox, 2013, and Hedges, 1996, I refer to the variety of Standard German used by the LGMs as "Mennonite High German," rather than "Standard German," because the variety has developed differently than what would be recognized as "Standard German." Similarly, the term "High German," "Huuchdietsch," is a term of reference by the group itself, and as such, I will continue to refer to this Germanic variety in this way throughout this dissertation.

positions within the *Dietsch* space. Good Gingrich (2016) writes about this "reproductive work" of women, noting that

> Many (im)migrant women demonstrated that their children and their role as mother were paramount for them. Preservation of religious tradition depends on women's work of reproduction—cultural, social, religious, and ethnic. A Dietsche woman knows that her primary responsibility in life is to "raise her children right." Virtually every aspect of life (healthcare, housing, work, and language) relates to caring work, raising children in the ways of her people (p. 157).

I will focus in this dissertation on the role of language in this configuration, and how the requirements for women as the primary reproducers of language and culture shift when families migrate to Canada, away from the structured support of the colonies and villages in Mexico. Specifically, in Mexico, the division of language proficiency in community-external varieties tends to be stratified by gender—men learn Spanish, women usually do not. Once in Canada, English language proficiency does not usually develop in a comparable way.

An important factor into how English proficiency develops among men and women is what the individuals are doing in their day-to-day lives. Many of the men work primarily with other LGM men—Justina's husband works as a cabinet maker, for example, with only other LGM men, and so does not actually speak any English on a regular basis. Neta's husband is a trucker, and so spends a lot of time on his own, listening to Low German radio and podcast programming. The women, on the other hand, are the ones managing the in-between space, bridging the cultural and linguistic spaces that their children inhabit, doing the "caring" and "reproductive" work, as Good Gingrich (2016) calls it. The mothers are the ones who interact

with the children's teachers, take them to the doctor when they are sick, interact with people at the grocery store or the neighbourhood. At least this is the case for the women in my study who either live in town or close enough to town that they have regular interactions with townspeople. This would of course be different for the families who live in more isolated rural settings. However, as a result of this regular interaction, their English skills often develop more rapidly than those of their husbands. This development can cause uncomfortable power imbalances for families still strongly connected to the Old Colony Church, given the official patriarchal power dynamic.

In Mexico, it is the men, generally speaking, who learn to speak Spanish, because they are the ones who manage business affairs, such as going to the bank or negotiating with other business people[4]. On the colonies in Mexico, men are the official centre of the community life—they are the teachers, the preachers, the decision makers. Since boys become the men who are the ones expected to fill the roles of teachers, preachers, and community leaders, they must have a stronger foundation in literacy and math so as to manage these responsibilities effectively, and so are expected to go to school for a year longer than girls do.

If we take Bourdieu's concept of *capital* to examine the dilemma of shifting power structures among LGMs, we see a clear demonstration of the impact of migration on the social construction of what constitutes the centre of the *Dietsch* space, a development which is quite unsettling especially for the leadership of the community. In Mexico, social and cultural capital can be easily identified and categorized. Those with the most power on Mennonite colonies in Mexico are married land-owning men who have children and who

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[4] For a more detailed discussion of this phenomenon in Mexico, please also see the analysis of Excerpt 3 in Chapter 7, on texting.

serve as preacher or bishop. The different domains that come together here are financial capital (land ownership), cultural capital (having a wife and children to perpetuate the community), and spiritual capital (being a "good Mennonite" by being baptised into and providing leadership in the Old Colony Church). These men further have a tendency to have a higher proficiency in Mennonite High German, which is strongly connected to cultural capital because it is the "high" language of church and education, along with a smattering of Spanish (linguistic capital).

This dynamic becomes upended when LGM families move to Canada, where the power of the community to influence capital orientation is strongly impacted by the reality of not only living interspersed with non-community members, but also being forced and sometimes wanting to integrate to a certain extent into mainstream society. While in Canada, men are still the ones inhabiting leadership roles in the church, their influence over all areas of *Jemeentschaft* and family life can be limited due to the influence of other factors, such as limited English language proficiency and limited contact with individuals outside the LGM community.

Tracing the change in linguistic capital is one way of mapping the shift. As already mentioned, in Mexico, generally speaking, women speak Low German and have some knowledge of Mennonite High German so that they can become members of the Old Colony community (they must be able to recite the catechism for baptism, for example). Learning Spanish is generally frowned upon, although that doesn't necessarily stop some families from encouraging their daughters to learn it (Greta, for example, talks about going to the neighbouring town to learn Spanish despite the official proclamation against this practice).

Men learn some Spanish in order to engage in the practices necessary for bringing in enough money. They are the ones who negotiate the in-between space, who bridge the in-group/out-group boundary. Once in Canada, however, this bridging role falls to women, who suddenly have a sharp increase in capital despite the fact that in Canada, like in Mexico, the general mechanisms of the *Jemeentschaft* (such as men in leadership) remain intact.

One woman who was a part of my study when I first started and a regular attender until she moved away, talked to me about how much she loved living in a town in Canada and the opportunities this afforded her children in comparison to what she could offer her children in Mexico. This woman moved her entire family first to a much more rural, remote location in Ontario that is more populated by LGMs, and then a few months later moved back to Durango Mexico permanently. When I asked about this, given that she was so enthusiastic about living in Canada, and that she didn't want to go back to Mexico except to visit, I was told that her husband (who was also a cabinet maker, working in a LGM-run business) was never comfortable in Canada. When I pressed her about this, asking what precisely had made her husband uncomfortable, she said he was never comfortable using English, and was upset by the fact that the children spoke better English than he did. She didn't explicitly say that her language skills were also better than her husband's, although her sister told me that she suspected this was a factor in the move also. A number of the women I spoke to throughout my study cited their husbands' discomfort with English was a factor in why they (or their friends and other family members) found themselves either moving repeatedly back and forth between Mexico and Canada, or moving back to Mexico permanently. This supports an interpretation of the significance of linguistic capital in gendered power dynamics.

LGMs and Literacy

(Il)literacy is a significant factor in the shift in (linguistic) capital between Mexico in Canada for both men and women. In Mexico, there are certain ways of interacting with texts and giving and receiving meaning through texts that are integral to active participation in the *Jemeentschaft*. Hedges (1996) has outlined the different ways in which individuals interact with texts in the context of colonies in Mexico, and argues that the literacy practices of Mennonites in Mexico are socially situated and constructed. However, what works in Mexico in terms of what reading and writing is and how it works breaks down in the Canadian context, where LGM literacy is perpetually characterized as "lacking." LGMs are often deemed "illiterate," for example (Good Gingrich, 2016). This is an oversimplification of the linguistic tools and strategies LGMs bring to interactions with texts.

Asking LGMs the question what languages they speak is not straightforward, as can be seen in the discussion of the linguascape in the previous sections. Whenever I asked this question, I would get some variation of the following answer:

Excerpt 1: We can read it

```
001   Int:              [haha >>((smile voice)) but i<< was wondering if

002              you could answer that question what languages do you speak

003   Neta:      i speak low german and english

004   Int:       okay (.) what about you eva

005   Eva:       the same=

006   Int:       =the same

007   Neta:      we're sisters >>((smile voice)) so(h)<< haha

008   All:       hahaha

009   Int:       ahhhhaha
```

```
010   All:       haha

011   Int:       what about high german i know greta mentioned that you

012              speak a little bit of high german

013   Neta:      ah we learned a little bit in school [but

014   Eva:                                           [we can read it but

015              °not much talking°
```

I repeatedly heard a variation of "we can read it but can't speak it" or "we can't read it but we can't understand it." The "school" conceptualization of literacy that dominates the North American context would hold that if you can't understand the text, you're not reading it, and are therefore illiterate (Larson & Marsh, 2014). However, this is an unhelpful reduction of the strategies and skills that LGM individuals use to make sense of and produce written text. Hedges (1996) makes this argument about LGM interactions with text in the Mexican context, and I would argue that access to a variety of technology, as well as the in many ways more flexible, or at least more varied linguistic context in Canada result in a shift, and a necessary restructuring of the *Dietsch* space with regard to linguistic and literacy practices.

Restructuring the role of literacy in the *Dietsch* space, and contesting the role of literacy in the wider Canadian space can be seen in the following excerpt, which comes from the first focus group discussion in the context of a longer conversation about texting practices (see chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion about texting). Greta is the primary speaker here, talking about the different and creative ways that LGM people use to communicate with one another via texting:

Excerpt 2: Brainwork

```
026   Greta:     basically it's all brainwork↓ (.) you figure out what

027              they're trying to say- you take the subject of what
```

```
028          you're talking about and then you figure it out (.)

029          any open-minded person can do that but if you're a

030          written text person it would be hard to figure out

031          what she is saying↓
```

In this excerpt, Greta names and describes two distinct membership categories.

Specifically, she uses "open-minded person" (line 029) in contrast to "written text person"

(030) to position those people who can interpret and make sense of the multilingual texting

practices that are undertaken in the LGM community. In doing so, she positions herself as an

"open-minded person," because she understands and participates in the practices that other

members of the LGM community participate in. This differentiation also positions me as a

"written text person," and subsequently as not part of the group. This was the first focus

group discussion and took place when I had not developed relationships with the women in

the group, and to them at the time, I would have been the very embodiment of a "written text

person." This positioning can be understood as a pre-emptive defense of the multilingual

practices they talk about and are using.

I am a written text person because my presence in the group has been explained to

them with the reason that I am writing a book about how LGMs use language, and so I want

to talk to them about how they feel about the languages they speak. When I first began

attending the group, the women still connected to the Old Colony Church, such as Justina or

Neta, didn't talk to me at all, and when they did, it was to ask me why in the world I would

want to write a book about them and Low German in the first place. The membership

category of "written text person" was one I had to actively dismantle in order to build the

relationships I did with the women I came to know. But the category itself, and Greta's use of

it index the level of mistrust of me and higher education, university research, and outsiders in general. In setting out this dichotomy, Greta clearly aligns herself with other members of the group, rather than with me, which is one of the reasons why she is so respected and trusted by the other members of the group.

The history of the LGMs and the themes outlined here—language and language attitudes, language and gender, and language and literacy—thread their way through the following chapters of the dissertation. The LGM participants in my study repeatedly refer to these themes. The ways these themes intersect in their narratives and conversations serve to construct the *Dietsch* space, and in turn contest norms around what constitutes the centre of this carefully constructed and at the same time fluid and dynamic *Dietsch* space.

Chapter 5 Onse Sproak(en): Multilingual language use, language attitudes, and laughter

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the multilingual language use of LGMs was one of the themes that emerged from the conversations in my data. In this chapter, I will examine how the participants talk about the different languages they speak, and what they say about the contexts in which they speak them. I will also discuss what impact the attitudes the participants demonstrate in talking about their (multilingual) linguistic practices have on the construction of the *Dietsch space*. Specifically, I will consider how participants construct the languages, especially in relation to different locations that came up repeatedly in my conversations with the participants—church, school, and home.

I have used the Low German words "Onse Sproak(en)" (our language(s)), as part of title of this chapter, because while most LGMs (including in my participant group) would claim Low German as their primary language, as will be discussed below, especially in the Canadian context, there are many other languages that they come into contact with. It becomes necessary for LGMs to really grapple with these different languages in terms of how they can integrate them into their *Dietsch space* in Canada.

The excerpts in this chapter are all chosen with regard to the expression of language attitudes and different positioning of mixed codes—in communication with children, co-constructing narratives about their past experiences in Mexico, the complications of code-

switching in conversation with monolingual Canadians, and common communicative strategies with one another. I further examine the ways in which the participants use humour and teasing in combination with laughter to evaluate and comment on belonging and position themselves. In my analysis, I discuss language attitudes that are displayed by the participants, paying particular attention to the role of laughter as a positioning mechanism. Furthermore, I make the case for the expansion of the definition of laughables to include identity (cf: Liebscher and Dailey-O'Cain, 2013).

Multilingual language use and language attitudes: Theoretical considerations

For LGMs in Mexico, the primary language is Low German, as is clear from how they are referred to by others, and how they refer to themselves ("*Dietsch*"). In the Canadian context, most of the women involved in my study named Low German as their first language and the one in which they report feeling most competent, and in Canada as in Mexico, this is the primary language associated with them. However, even for those who no longer claim *Dietsch* as their (primary) language, there was a tendency to self-identify as *Dietsch*, thus laying claim to the *Dietsch* space. Low German is the language they still use to refer to themselves. For those still using the language, it is one of the primary languages in which most of them make sense of their experiences. However, Low German is not the only language that LGMs come into contact with, neither in Mexico, nor in Canada. In Mexico, they encounter Low German, Mennonite High German, Spanish, and English to varying degrees, while in Canada, they encounter Low German, Mennonite High German, English, and potentially French. As Hedges (1996) convincingly argues, *Dietsch* life in Mexico is not diglossic, despite the association of the primary languages of *Huuchdietsch* and *Plautdietsch*

into particular areas of colony life. As such, LGMs have clear perceptions of what "should be" in comparison to "what is," and I argue that they have similar perceptions of what "should be" and "what is" in the new and more linguistically diverse Canadian context.

Hedges (1996) found that the majority of community practices in Mexico fell into two distinct "realms"—the "sindeosche" (Sunday-like) realm, and the "auldeosche" (every day-like) realm. In her study, which focused on a number of villages in the Chihuahua area, many participants divided language up into these realms as well when they were asked about what "should" be happening linguistically. According to Hedges' participants, church and school should be linguistically governed by Mennonite High German, as the prestige language connected to church and faith, and the linguistic and literacy practices associated with them. Other community practices, such as *spasearen* (general visiting with neighbours and family), business *within* the village or colony, and other interactions should be linguistically governed by Low German, as the language of the community. However, Hedges found that the actual practices individuals described engaging in, whether these were literacy or other linguistic practices, did not fall so neatly into the two realms. For example, church and school were both constructed in her data as multilingual, rather than monolingual spaces, including Mennonite High German *and* Low German. Furthermore, the everyday life of the colony was also constructed as a highly multilingual space, including interactions in Low German, Mennonite High German, Spanish, as well as English.

Participants in my data describe similar multilingual practices that do not allow themselves to be neatly categorized into either "high or low-prestige" language practice (cf. Cox, 2013). Similar tensions to Hedges' study resulting from a particular linguistic ideology

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about ideal language use being enacted differently from what "should be" in "real life" seem to remain, though. Much like in other linguistic contexts, the majority of my multilingual participants speak against a monolingual English ideology, and in this case against the privileging of English as the monolingual ideal in English-speaking Canada. The LGMs have the added layer of complication that the privileging of English in the Canadian context is directly antithetical to their faith-based goals to remain separate from the world and to maintain a particular way of life. This maintenance of a particular way of life (including the maintenance of Low German and Mennonite High German) is directly linked to their salvation, and as such is not a mere choice of what language to use in a given context. At the same time, they speak against the diglossic ideology of language use that is divided into the realms Hedges (1996) identified, as I will show further below.

Laughter: Theoretical considerations

One of the practices through which space is practiced and constructed is laughter. Specifically, I will examine the role of *laughter* as a mechanism constituting space and group identity, paying special attention to the ways in which laughter indexes shared experiences and evaluates belonging, while arguing for an expansion of the traditional definition of a laughable (what is being laughed *at/about*). Laughter is a semiotic device that indexes shared experiences, and as such positions participants in relation to different subject positions. The meaning of particular laughter is constructed through its referent, the *laughable* (Jefferson, 1987), which in turn is the cue for making sense of the shared experience of laughter. As a result, how different participants orient towards the laughable is how laughter becomes a powerful positioning tool.

Laughter is a way for groups to index membership, to construct categories of belonging, experiences, and identities (Glenn, 2003). I knew I wanted to look at the role of laughter in the LGM community, because the "teasing culture" is regularly referenced by service providers, and from my own experience growing up with the Low German language, there were often jokes that were uproariously funny for my grandmother and my aunts and uncles that didn't usually translate very well. Service providers told me explicitly that I would know if I had effectively connected with women in the LGM community if they laughed at (with) me. This was before I started my fieldwork, and I thought this was an interesting pointer that might provide profound insight into the LGM language use. Looking back on the experience now, including my field notes, it is clear that this pointer held significant insight. I realized group members trusted me when they started teasing me, including me in inside jokes and telling Low German jokes at my expense knowing that I could understand them.

I wanted to see how this was manifested at the language and communication level itself—I have evidence of this transformation in my observations, but I wanted to see how this was achieved discursively in interaction. The best place to look at this is in the focus group discussions I recorded with a group of the regular participants. What emerged clearly points to the role of laughter as a group construction mechanism, especially as it relates to identity (and self) construction. I have critiqued the usefulness of Wenger's (1991) "community of practice" elsewhere in this dissertation, but this concept bears discussing again in relation to the role of laughter among LGMs. While LGMs as a *group* cannot be discussed as a "community of practice," the women who formed the CAPC group can and perhaps even should be characterized this way. Laughter is a mechanism for making sense of

how they view themselves, and others, and how they comment on and build solidarity with one another.

Laughter is a mechanism for indexing *degree* of belonging, and the laughter at or with other members of the group constitutes a process of identity construction, whether that is prescribed or self-constructed. The construction of Low German by the group is influenced by the way in which Low German and the LGM community itself is constructed by the wider Canadian population. According to Good Gingrich (2016), the LGM community is repeatedly positioned as less than in comparison to other Mennonites, as well as non-Mennonite Canadians (p. 21). This has previously been identified by Braun (2008) in analyzing the perceptions of LGMs by other Mennonites, namely that "Mexican Mennonites" are often deemed "second-class Mennonites." This outside positioning may contribute to the "supposed to" attitude that is displayed repeatedly in the conversations of the LGM women I talked to.

Language attitudes and church

One observation that can be made based on my data is the strong connection between language attitudes and church. The following excerpt allows insight into how participants perceive Low German, despite the fact that it is a low status language in the Canadian context, and how closely tied it seems to be to the expression of religious faith. This excerpt occurs during the first focus group discussion, and the primary speakers are Neta, her sister Eva, as well as Greta and Irma. The excerpt is part of a longer discussion on how participants perceive the differences between community life in Mexico and in Canada. The initial response is about the physical reality—namely that people live much further apart from one

another. They don't live in villages anymore, and must renegotiate how community life

functions, precisely because they are not physically as close together any more. While the

participants' discussions about community life in Mexico is primarily characterized by how

their lives were constrained and controlled by rules and community perceptions, in church

and in school, and in general daily life, the way they talk about their experiences in Canada

now is quite different.

Excerpt 1: More love

```
001   Int:        how is the community different here in canada compared to

002               in mexico?

[...]

011   Eva:        there's more love in church here than in mexico much more

012   Greta:      more love

013   Neta:       and then the church here is in low german most of it is in

014               low german we can understand more

015   Greta:      so it's

016   Irma:       in mexico it's high german

017   Neta:       it is different
```

In this excerpt, Low German is constructed as a deeply personal language, which is associated

with faith ("the church here is in low german," line 013). Having church in Low German

instead of Mennonite High German increases agentive capacity in terms of coming to

conclusions and making decisions about issues related to faith, since, as Neta states "we can

understand more" (line 014).

Worth mentioning here is the specificity with which Neta refers to the language

variety. Generally, as will be seen in excerpts throughout the dissertation, Low German is

referred to by the participants as "German," which is a direct translation of the Low German

word "*Dietsch*." Most of the time, it is not necessary for LGMs to differentiate between Low German and Mennonite High German, because Low German is so much more central to all aspects of their daily life. The context of church provides an exception, however, precisely because of the two-realm system ("sindeosche" vs. "auldeosche") identified by Hedges (1996) governing contexts in which the prestige language *Huuchdietsch* is used. According to this system, in Mexico, church is conducted in Mennonite High German (including songs, prayers, and sermons), and although as participants describe, church in Canada is held primarily in Low German, texts that are used in the church context, such as the sermon book, are still in Mennonite High German.

The *Dietsch* space constructed in this excerpt is a multilingual one including Low German and Mennonite High German, in which Low German indexes positive associations ("love," lines 011-012; "more understanding," line 014), while Mennonite High German seems to index the opposite associations by default and implied comparison, since Low and Mennonite High German are positioned as dichotomous in this excerpt. Because the languages are tied to specific associations, in excerpt 1, it is important for Neta to specify that she is talking about Low German, rather than Mennonite High German, which is named specifically by Irma in line 016. Naming the varieties as different, both Neta and Irma position themselves as being able to identify and negotiate the tension between the two languages in the LGM context. Neta does this within the Old Colony Church context, and Irma does this outside of the church context, because she no longer belongs to the Old Colony Church.

One of the ways in which Neta has been negotiating this tension in her church is that she has lobbied for her church to change the Sunday School curriculum to be taught in English, rather than in Mennonite High German, so that the children will be more connected

to the Bible stories, and as a result, more connected to the church and their faith. This effort has not been easy for her, and she has met with opposition from the leadership, although many parents, and especially the children, are very much in favour of the change. For Neta it is more important that the children stay connected and a part of the church than that the language is maintained. For example, Neta bought an English Bible for her children to read. For herself, she bought a Low German Bible so that she could understand what her children were talking about having read in the English storybooks: "now I have [a Bible] that [has] from one side Low German and one side English that I can understand more than before." This multilingual text is important for her in exercising her agentive capacity in the church context, and with her children, because she has access to the same information and knowledge that the children do through their texts. Church, and by extension faith being something that can be engaged with through multilingual practices, is something that increases Neta's agentive capacity.

Language attitudes about mixed codes

Mixing languages is a topic that comes up with some frequency in the recorded data, and was also often a topic of observed conversation just generally in the group. The attitudes towards language mixing are, as can often be the case (cf: Dewaele & Wei, 2014), multi-layered and complex, and were displayed differently depending on the context about which they talked, as we will see in the following excerpts. On the one hand, the way in which the women talk about how they and their children speak indicates a preference for speaking one language at a time, rather than mixing, and although they are invested in their children becoming fluent in Low German, it is English that their children seem to prefer.

The following excerpts, 2a and 2b, address both the issue of language mixing, and the tension the language mixing creates given that the women see themselves as responsible for their children's Low German language development. I have separated the two excerpts, which are part of a longer discussion and follow immediately after one another, to allow me to draw attention to the different factors and positions that come up in the two excerpts. Excerpt 2a occurs about twenty minutes into the second focus group discussion. The main speakers in this excerpt are Aggie, Neta, and Katharina (Kath). These participants are all still active members of the Old Colony or *Kleine Gemeinde* churches. Greta, another primary speaker in this excerpt, is no longer a member of any Mennonite-affiliated church. In this excerpt, the laughter itself is an expression of the attitudes related to languages and mixed codes.

Excerpt 2a: Germlish

```
001   Int:        ahm what uh languages do you speak with your children?

002               (0.3)

003   Kath:       i do both english [and german

004   Aggie:                        [mix up

005   Int:        mixed up

006   Greta:      germglish

007   Aggie:      ((smile voice)) germli[sh hh yeah

008   All:                              [hahahahahaha

009   Neta:                             [>>((smile voice))ja ger(h)mlish<<

010               haha

011   All:        hahahahaha

012   Neta:       we supposed to speak german at home but it's more

013               english than german

014   Aggie:      it's rea:lly hard for the kids to speak german↑

015               °right°
```

```
016   Neta:      ja
017              (.)
```

In this excerpt, Kath (line 003), Aggie (line 004), and Neta (line 012), all position

themselves as multilingual speakers with enough linguistic flexibility to "mix up" (line 004)

the languages in their linguascape. "Mix up" in this excerpt does not seem to indicate

confusion on the part of the women themselves, but especially with the use of the verb "do"

(line 003) seems to indicate an active communicative process. The group further does not

seem to orient to this "mix up" as a negative; instead, because they laugh in response to and

repeatedly confirm (lines 007; 009) the naming of the mixed code ("germlish"), they make it a

common experience that can be discussed openly, rather than hidden or kept quiet. Even

before an utterance in response to the question about what languages they speak to their

children, however, line 002 gives an indication of a language attitude. The pause itself

indicates a difficulty in giving a straightforward fitting answer to the question. This is because

it is not a list of discrete languages that best describes their language use at all, but rather a

mixed code for which there is not a readily available label. Thus naming of the code clearly

becomes an in-group word, an interpretation which is strengthened by the repetition of the

term "germlish" by both Aggie and Neta in combination with the group laughter.

The group laughter that occurs in line 008 is at the same time about the naming of the

code, using a word not all of them may have heard before, but can identify with immediately,

as well as a comment on the mixed code itself. The term "germlish" (line 007) itself is

interesting because it underlines the way in which LGMs talk about themselves—as *Dietsch*,"

which they consistently translate into English as "German," rather than "Low German" or

code-switching to use "Dietsch" or "Plautdietsch," in the context of my data. Greta is the

participant who uses the term for the first time in the interaction (in line 006), and when she

uses it, she pronounces a "g" in the middle—"germGlish." Greta talked openly to me both on

and off-tape about how divided she felt between her languages, and even her "selves" when

she came to Canada from Mexico. This term is representative of that tension, and of who she

is in a way, because she feels both *Dietsch* and Canadian, German and English, at the same

time. When Aggie and Neta repeat the term, however, they pronounce it without a "g." The

fact that they both repair the word in the same way indicates that they heard Greta's

utterance as "repairable," and thus indicate that the term is somehow familiar to them. In this

way they position themselves as able to name linguistic varieties, and to correct Greta, despite

her own repeated positioning as expert and ambassador.

In this excerpt, it is Neta, who is a founding member of the group and still an active

member of the Old Colony Church, who is the first to engage in "open laughter" in line 010.

This is particularly interesting in light of what she says in line 012, which is a direct

articulation of the perception of mixing, namely that it is not something they are "supposed

to" do. The tension between what they are "supposed to" do and what they "are" doing comes

up repeatedly, and becomes part of the construction of *Dietsch* space in the connection

between language choice and space.

Excerpt 2a draws attention to the importance of place in language choice and

language practice, and the subsequent construction of the space associated with the place. In

line 012, Neta constructs "home" as a space where Low German "should be" spoken, but where

either mixed code or English dominates. Neta uses the pronoun "we" in her statement—"we

supposed to," and it seems that this "we" is connected to the shared experience of home being

this kind of multilingual space that was indexed by the group laughter in lines 008 and 011. Part of the home being constructed as a multilingual space is that the participants frequently positioned themselves as responsible for the Low German education of their children. Part of the "supposed to" Neta refers to is this responsibility the women feel, which will be examined further in excerpt 2b below. In line 014, Aggie offers an explanation for why there is more English being spoken at home than Low German, because "it's really hard for the kids to speak german." She adds a tag question, however, indicating a potential hesitation to admit the difficulty, given the responsibility they feel they have as mothers to teach their children Low German. Neta affirms Aggie's evaluation in line 016.

The following excerpt continues the conversation started in excerpt 2a, with the primary speakers shifting to Neta and Justina. In excerpt 2b, both women explicitly position themselves as responsible for their children's Low German language acquisition. Conversational fluency in the language is constructed not only as central to the relationship development between generations, but also a significant component in what constitutes the centre of the *Dietsch* space. In order for their children to participate fully, they need to be at least conversationally fluent in Low German, because if they are not, their linguistic capital for participating in the *Dietsch* space is significantly reduced. While fluency in English is part of the linguistic capital required for agentive capacity in the   Canadian space, in order to have agentive capacity in the *Dietsch* space, facility with Low German is important.

Excerpt 2b: Supposed to speak German

```
001    Int:      okay you said- you said they're supposed to speak german at
002              home why are they supposed to speak german at home?
```

```
003   Neta:      because their uh grandparents speak german and they wanted

004              to talk to the kids↓

005   Int:       yeah

006   Justina:   and nowhere else would the kids learn low german except

007              home from the mother and father (.) if they were allowed

008              all the time english they wouldn't know low german and then

009              the grandparents could never speak to their grandchildren.
```

In this excerpt, Neta and Justina both construct home as a multilingual space, but here the focus is on Low German. More significantly, in the Canadian context, home is constructed as the *only* place where children can learn Low German ("nowhere else would the kids learn" line 006). This underlines one of the primary differences in language patterns after the migration from Mexico to Canada. In Mexico, Low German is a significant part of the LGM linguascape—central to how they see themselves, the language in which they conduct a majority of the conversations they have with one another inside and outside of their homes. The use of the language in most aspects of daily life serves to construct the *Dietsch* space in the Mexican context. This is in part because LGMs live in geographic vicinity to one another, in villages and colonies, and interact primarily with other LGMs on a day-to-day basis. In Canada, however, where the dominant language in Ontario is English, and LGMs often live in isolation from other LGMs, Low German is seen here as limited to the home space ("nowhere else would the kids learn" line 006). While the children might encounter Low German in other locations, such as church on Sunday, or the church where the CAPC group meets, in this excerpt, home is constructed as the primary place where Low German language learning *can* occur.

In this excerpt, Neta, and especially Justina construct the *Dietsch* space as a heritage space, by talking about Low German not just as a useful language, but as a language that connects generations to one another (lines 003-004; 007-009). Low German taking a central role in the construction of *Dietsch* space has problematic implications for the children having relatively limited exposure and opportunity to learn Low German. Specifically, if the children do not learn Low German, they remain at the periphery of the *Dietsch* space, separated from family and heritage. The women are aware of this tension, both talking about how important it is, and also talking about how difficult it is to raise their children to be fluent in Low German. In an excerpt that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Neta comments "there's a lot of times that my kids have [questions…]. If you speak it in German they don't understand. They ask: what does that mean?"

School in Mexico as multilingual space

In Mexico, school falls into the "sindeosche" realm, and "should be" conducted in Mennonite High German, as outlined by Hedges (1996), but as the women reported, school in Mexico is not a monolingual experience. In the following excerpt, the participants discuss what was and was not permitted in relation to language in school in Mexico. Excerpt 3 occurs in the first focus group discussion that was conducted when I hardly knew the women at all. The women still connected to the Old Colony Church hardly spoke to me, although Greta and Irma (who are both no longer a part of the Old Colony Church) were eager to act as cultural interpreters. Irma and Aggie, another speaker in this excerpt, are cousins, and Irma still spends a lot of time with the family members who are a part of the church. Preceding the question about what school was like in Mexico, the group was discussing where and when

they learned the languages they speak—Low German at home, English from their children, and that they were "supposed to" learn Mennonite High German in school, but were not able to, because the teachers did not speak Mennonite High German either.

Excerpt 3: Oohlala

```
001   Int:       can you talk a little bit about what school was like in

002              mexico?

003   Irma:      >>oohlala:: ((drawn out voice))<<

004   All:       hahahaha hahahaha hehehe[he

005   Aggie:                              [(irma?)

006   Irma:      the [floor is mi::ne

007   All:           [huhu        hahaha hehe

009   Int:       go ahead

010   (0.2)

011   Irma:      hm (oohlal[a)           (well)

012   All:                 [hehehehehehihihi

013   Greta:     no you were not allowed to say oohlala

014              in mexico in [school no

015   Rita:                   [no

016   All:       hahaha haha

017   Neta:      we didn't even know that word there

018   All:       hahahahahaha huhu ha

019   Neta:      >>((softly)) or whatever<< >>((smile voice)) it is<<

020   All:       haha haha ha[ha
```

Irma positions herself as an authority about schooling in Mexico ("the floor is mine" line 006), and more specifically positions herself as able to take a critical stance about schooling in Mexico, which in turn creates an opportunity for the other participants to take a critical stance vis-à-vis their schooling experiences in Mexico. Irma's critical stance is achieved through humour, specifically through the production of "oohlala" in line 003, which is oriented to by all participants through raucous laughter. The production of "oohlala" in line 003 constructs a particular space, which indexes specific associations with the school context, about how many things were forbidden and not allowed. Irma reinforces the construction of a space that indexes secrecy by withholding the essential information (what school was like in Mexico), despite providing evaluation in the orientation component of her narrative (Labov, 1972). She holds the floor by explicitly commenting on her having the floor in line 006, and then repeating "oohlala" in line 011.

Irma's floor-holding in these instances is also a commentary on how much there is to say about school in Mexico, so much that she has to take a series of turns to set it up. Each of these turns is oriented to by the group in the same way—with uproarious laughter. There are a number of reasons for this reaction, the first of which Greta directly comments on in line 013: "no you were not allowed to say oohlala in mexico in school no," which is ratified by Neta in line 017. Neta's utterance is doubly interesting because of her ratification of Greta's assessment, in combination with her own admission that she doesn't actually know whether "oohlala" is a word or not (line 019). Despite the fact that Neta (and presumably others in the group) says she didn't actually know the word in Mexico (line 017), maybe had never heard it before, they orient towards it with laughter and shared experience anyway.

The laughter in response to Neta's assessment in line 017 and also her admission that she does not know whether "oohlala" is a word is indicative of a potentially different conceptualization of what a word even is. As will be discussed further in chapter 7, the conceptualization of language as not necessarily connected to written form, which is common for the LGM women represented in my data, results in a more flexible conceptualization of what the connection is between sound and meaning.

The use of particular pronouns is relevant in this excerpt too. In line 013, Greta uses "you," which could be interpreted as including herself (inclusive you), or not (exclusive you). Greta did go to school in Mexico, but her use of "you" here positions her at the periphery of the *Dietsch* space, because her use of a nebulous pronoun does not clearly include her. Then in line 017, Neta's use of "we" positions Neta as being able to assess what was known or not known in the Mexican context, and thus positions herself at the centre of *Dietsch* space.

Although the initial question to the group was about what their experiences of *school* were like in Mexico (lines 001-002), the place referred to where things were forbidden is "Mexico" (line 014), not school specifically. "Mexico," then, is constructed by Neta as a space where there were words that were unknown, and by Greta as a space where there were words that were forbidden ("you were not allowed to say oohlala in mexico no" line 013). In other words, Mexico is constructed as a space where what is speakable is constrained, either by a lack of knowledge or by rules and regulations about appropriate language use. Because this commentary on Mexico is made in response to a question about school, I would argue that the same is true about the construction of school in the Mexican context. School, as a result, is a place that does not index significant agentive capacity for the women in my study.

The shared laughter in this excerpt also indexes the shared experience of school in Mexico—participants talked a lot about their school experiences, how traumatic these were in many cases, how they didn't understand what they were doing, that it was stressful and that they were publicly shamed if they got the wrong answer or they looked out the window for too long. All of the women who participated in this focus group discussion went to school in Mexico for at least a few years, and a few completed their entire schooling in Mexico. For these women, school was not a positive experience, for the reasons outlined above. But there is a lot of laughter in their discursively constructed narratives about schooling, a fact which reinforces their connections to one another, indexes their shared experiences, and validates the negativity of that shared experience. In the cases of narratives about language use (specifically Low German) at school in Canada, which I will examine next, the laughter ratifies the shared experience, and it also comments on the tension inherent in these experiences. For most of the women, schooling in Mexico and Canada was equally negative for different reasons.

School in Canada as multilingual space

School in both Mexico and Canada is constructed as governed by monolingual language ideology—in Mexico, the "supposed to" language is Mennonite High German, while in Canada, the "supposed to" language is English. However, the language practices in which LGM children engage are multilingual language practices, contesting constructions of school being a monolingual space. Excerpt 4 occurs in the second focus group discussion, again as part of the conversation about teaching Low German to children. One of the primary speakers in this excerpt is Rita, the volunteer group leader who has no connection to the

Mennonite church. She is a former teacher with extensive experience working with LGM children and with fluency in a variety of languages she learned as an adult. Also part of this focus group is Patty, who has left the Old Colony Church, and who consistently positions herself explicitly as "not-Old Colony." Most of the women themselves went to school in Mexico *and* in Canada, and their school experiences in Canada were characterized negatively in part because they didn't speak English (see chapter 6 for further discussion).

In the following excerpt, Patty gives an example of a young child needing to have their nose wiped, and being unable to tell their teacher what they need because they do not know the English translation for the Low German word "schnodda" (snot). Patty provides this example as evidence for why children should not be taught Low German, despite the fact that a number of the women make impassioned justifications (as in excerpt 1b, earlier in this chapter) for why they continue to teach their children Low German, the ones that are common for migrant families everywhere (cf: Oh & Fuligni, 2010)—to talk to grandparents and cousins who don't speak English.

Excerpt 4a: Schnodda

```
001   Rita:      usually if you speak one language at home and one

002              language at school if kids are young they don't

003              have any trouble with that [and probably=

004   Patty:                                [but

005   Rita:      =and when they go to school they learn that that's

006              english and that's german

007   Int:       yeah

008   Rita:      they will DO that (.) but when they're really young
```

```
009              they use both languages at the same time (.)

010   Neta:      mhm

011   Rita:      [they don't know

012   Patty:     [but that gets confusing right [like she said

013   Rita:                                       [only for the listener (.)

014              the kids are not conf(h)used heh heh=

015   Patty:     [well no i know

016   Rita:      [=within WEEKS they

017   Patty:     but if they have to go and explain something to their

018              teacher oh i have SCHNO[:DDA↑

019              (.)

020   All:                              [hehehe ha[ha

021   Patty:                                       [well what is

022              that hehehe [i have SCHNODDA

023   All:              [hahaha he[hehe

024   Patty:                        [don't you know what schnodda is↑

025   All:       hehehe haha[ha

026   Rita:                 [that's right

027   Julie:     what's schnodda

028   Int:       snot
```

This excerpt begins with Rita positioning herself as having the authority to comment

on what children's experiences with language are when they come to school without speaking

English, specifically that "they don't have any trouble with" speaking a different language at

home and at school (line 001-003). Rita constructs school as a space where one language

dominates ("one language at home and one language at school" lines 001-002), and at the same time constructs school as the space where the children learn the differences between different languages ("when they go to school they learn that that's english and that's german" lines 005-006). It is worth noting that in Rita's construction, this learning does not occur at home, but occurs at school. Furthermore, she positions the children as flexible users of language, who learn quickly and are "not confused," although listening adults might be (line 012).

Patty, however, contests this characterization of children as flexible language learners and users. In line 004, she objects to Rita's assertion that the children don't have a problem with navigating between different languages ("but"), although Rita holds the floor, speaking in overlap with her to say that in school they learn the difference between the languages. In line 011, Patty jumps in with another "but" construction—"but that gets confusing right". The phrase "like she said," can be interpreted as referring to Neta's discussion about how difficult it is for her children sometimes to know the difference between the different languages which will be discussed further below (in excerpt 5).

Rita does not accept the objection, asserting that "the kids are not confused" and that the problem lies with "the listener" (lines 013-014). In this way, she underlines her construction of children as flexible language users. However, because the context they are talking about is school, Rita continues to construct school as a primarily monolingual space, one where multilingual language use does cause confusion, presumably for the teachers and other school staff who are listening to the multilingual children figure out the difference between the languages in their repertoire. This underlines the tension between the

expectations of the Canadian school space, in terms of which languages *should be* spoken (in this case, English) and how this is governed by monolingual ideology. Thus, Rita positions herself, as a former teacher, as someone who can speak to how language can and cannot be done in the school space.

Patty then brings a "small story" (Georgakopoulou, 2007) that includes code-switching into Low German through which she positions herself as more knowledgeable about the experiences of Low German children than Rita. The small story Patty tells counters Rita's construction of the spaces of home and school being cleanly separated, since in Patty's example, the child brings Low German into an English interaction. The code switching in this excerpt, even though it is minimal, is integral to how Patty positions herself vis-à-vis the other LGM women (and thus the *Dietsch* space), as well as vis-à-vis the non-group members who do not speak Low German—Rita and Julie (and potentially the interviewer). Through the use of the code switch, Patty constructs herself as having the language flexibility in Low German required to take a position closer to the centre of the *Dietsch* space, despite elsewhere explicitly positioning herself as *outside of* the *Dietsch* space (in excerpt 5, discussed below). The code switch allows Patty to position the group leaders as outsiders, since they don't speak Low German. Although Rita joins in the laughter in line 020, Julie must ask for a translation of the code-switched word in line 027. I provided the translation for the code-switched word, however, which in subsequent lines was ratified by Greta, and thus positioned myself as part of the *Dietsch* space in a way that Rita and Julie are unable to.

Patty's narrative about talking to a teacher about wiping a child's nose is imaginary, of course, but is oriented to by the other participants with laughter, because it indexes a

linguistic experience all of them have previously had, whether that was in school themselves, or in another context, where the word they used did not communicate what they wanted. The other participants orient towards Patty's small story with affiliative laughter, which constructs the story as familiar and highlights the tension in the LGM experience of language use. The code-switch itself is oriented to as a laughable initially in line 020. However, the situation Patty has set up, where the speaker is trying to make herself understood by repeating the word (in lines 022 and 024), unable to provide the English language constituent, is also oriented to with laughter. As such, the laughable is more complex than simply the code-switched word—it is the tension itself, the discomfort of being positioned as voiceless or incompetent because of missing vocabulary words.

In response to Patty's argument against multilingual language use being beneficial in excerpt 4a, the conversation continues with Rita reiterating her positioning of multilingual children as flexible language users. In response, however, Neta tells the story of little Abe Friesen, who experienced exactly the thing that Patty said was not desirable—mixing codes in such a way that other people do not understand.

Excerpt 4b: Loopy

```
029   Rita:      but you know it takes and and that when they're under

030              seven years old BOOM they can switch just like that↑

031              and they can learn really fast

032   Int:       right yeah

033   Neta:      like abe (.) ah friesen he always has when he was playing

034              when he was like a (.) five six year old boy when he was

035              playing his pants were down so much and then his dad
```

```
036                always said i can see your loopy↓

037   Patty:       mhm

038   Neta:        and then at scho:ol and the other kids their pants

039                were kinda down and then he says i can see your loopy↓

040   All:         hehe he HA haha

041   Neta:        well what does loopy mean

042   All:         hahaha hahaha hehehe

043   Neta:        >>((smile voice)) and he thought it was english but i

044                guess<< it was:: spanish °or something°

045   All:         hehehe

046   Rita:        hehe i(h) do(h)n't know ha ha ha

047   Int:         °that's funny°
```

It is in response to Rita's reassertion that especially young children have the ability to switch fairly easily back and forth between languages, that Neta tells her code-switching small story in this excerpt. Neta begins at line 033 with "like," which at first glance indicates an alignment with Rita's utterance in line 030 that children can "switch just like that." However, in telling this small story, which echoes Patty's example in excerpt 4a, Neta aligns herself with Patty, positioning herself as able to contest Rita's characterization of multilingualism in the Canadian public school space as primarily positive in both excerpts 4a and 4b.

In Neta's narrative, which is presented as a story that was actually experienced, rather than as a hypothetical example, she relays the experience of a little boy whose pants kept hanging too low, so that his "loopy" was showing. It is unclear exactly what "loopy" means—

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presumably rear end or underwear—but it is neither Low German nor Spanish, nor English, nor Mennonite High German, as far as I can tell. However, as with the code switch in excerpt 4a, again the specific instance of code switching ("schnodda" in excerpt 4a and "loopy" in excerpt 4b) is oriented to with group laughter. The difference is that Patty's code switch in 4a is recognized as a code switch into Low German, while Neta characterizes the code switch in 4b as a code-switch into a language other than Low German, when she positions herself as not knowing the meaning in lines 043-044 ("i guess it was spanish or something").

In these same lines, where Neta is making an attempt to locate and categorize the code-switched word in a sensible way, Neta positions herself in relation to a variety of languages. Neta assumes that Abe Friesen didn't know "loopy" wasn't English, but Neta also positions herself as not knowing exactly what language to ascribe it to. By addressing it at all, she positions herself as potentially being able to identify and categorize the languages, although she talks about herself as only being able to speak English and Low German.

The fact that Neta names the boy specifically in her small story is significant because it positions those who recognize the child's name as people who share similar knowledge. In Neta's narrative, it is the boy's father who repeatedly teased him by telling him that his "loopy" was showing, which the little boy uses himself to poke fun at other children in the schoolyard. The other children don't understand what loopy means, and the result is that little Abe Friesen is positioned as an outsider, as different from other Canadian children.

The construction of multilingual language use at home as unproblematic and commonplace is contrasted with multilingual language use at school as causing communication problems and confusion in this excerpt. While code switching seems to be

positively connotated in the narrative in this excerpt at home, part of everyday interaction between a father and son, it is negatively connotated at school, since it positions Abe Friesen as an outsider. In these few lines of narrative, it is possible to see the tension and shift in capital in the different spaces in which LGMs move. At home, Low German, and mixed language use or play with language is common, and is what connects parents and children to one another and constructs the broader *Dietsch* space. However, when those same multilingual language strategies are engaged in school, Low German, or multilingual language use in general, can shift individuals' agentive capacity, especially when they cannot tell the difference between different languages and use them intentionally.

Both Patty and Neta use the stories as semiotic resources to position themselves within the conversation as well as within the *Dietsch* space. In excerpt 4a as well as 5 below, Patty positions herself as the expert of both the *Dietsch* identity and culture, as well as the broader Canadian culture in her objections to teaching children Low German. In excerpt 4b, Neta also positions herself as knowledgeable about *Dietsch* identity and culture, especially about situations that involve interactions with the Canadian culture. However, unlike Patty, Neta values her children knowing Low German, and although it sometimes causes communication problems, it is something that is important to her. Throughout the focus group discussion and individual interviews, Neta positions herself as *Dietsch*, with a strong connection to the Old Colony Church, at the same time that she contests various aspects especially of the church community with which she disagrees.

Neta telling the story about Abe Friesen, and the laughter that accompanies it, position Neta in an affiliative relationship with Patty, despite (or perhaps because of) her

disagreement with Patty's hard-lined stance as far as linguistic choice and cultural affiliation go. Despite the fact that Patty is so dominating, Neta serves a central function in the group, contesting both what is central and peripheral in the *Dietsch* space. Greta often has a similar function, but Greta is no longer a part of the Old Colony Church, whereas Neta is still an active member, and so Neta's negotiating between central and peripheral positions has even more of a profound impact on the group social dynamics than Greta's because Neta continues to negotiate the tensions in her daily life experiences that Greta no longer needs to. It is Neta in excerpt 1a who initiates the laughter, and who also leads the first-position laughter about both the *schnodda* narrative in excerpt 4a, in addition to telling the small story about little Abe Friesen in excerpt 4b.

Another aspect of this example is the interviewer's assertion in line 047 that the story was "funny," despite the fact that I had no idea what loopy meant. While the group oriented towards the story with much laughter (in lines 033, 035 and 038), I didn't know exactly what was being laughed about, and the assertion in line 047 is an attempt to reassert my group membership, which I had with Patty's example, because I understood immediately what "schnodda" means and didn't have to ask about it like Julie did. For me as the researcher, positioning myself as an outsider-insider and establishing group affiliation was a constant process of negotiation, even when I didn't necessarily notice it at the time. Stories such as little Abe Friesen's are common in my own growing up, with relatives and friends often recounting the use of "home words" in public English-speaking spaces in the mistaken belief that the word or phrase would easily translate. So I understood the narrative trope, just not the specific code-switched reference.

Home as a multilingual space

The use of "home words" and attitudes about them is a part of the construction of a home space. How participants orient towards different languages and language practices in their linguascape is multi-layered, depending on who is talking and what the context is, as we have seen in the previous excerpts. While some participants make clear that it is important for their children to learn Low German, the positive attitudes towards Low German in the home space and the sense of obligation to pass on the language are not shared by all participants. When asked about use of Low German, Patty said she only uses Low German to "have fun with [her] sister," or to make jokes, and that she doesn't "even speak it that well." As a result, she has intentionally not taught her children Low German, and holds a very different attitude from the one held by Neta and Justina in excerpt 2b. This can be seen in excerpt 5:

Excerpt 5: German will come naturally

```
001   Patty:     but in my opinion why live in a country like (.) canada
002              where the first language is english why why would you teach
003              them a different language (.) °right↑°
004              'cause if you're gonna live here the first thing you should
005              know is english because↑ (.) everything has to do with the
006              english right↑
007              like they go to school (.) kids go to school knowing only
008              german and then so they're set back just as far as those
009              who come from mexico (.) don't know the language don't know
010              anything about the culture=or=anything so they're set back
011              by having to FIRST of all learn the language and then catch
012              up with the rest of the kids right↑
```

```
013              like uh to me it just makes sense that you would teach them

014              english first (.) like the german will come naturally even

015              if they don't speak it they can understand it right↑ like

016              if you still speak it at home like °as=a=family°

017   Neta:      well there's a lot of times that my kids ask what does that

018              mean↑


019   Patty:     like for the [german↑


020   Justina:                 [ya


021   Neta:      if we speak it german they don't understand they ask what

022              does it mean↑ and then i have to explain that in english
```

In previous excerpts analyzed in this chapter, Patty positions herself as part of the

Dietsch space—able to code-switch with flexibility, and able to contest Rita's assertion that

the multilingualism LGM children bring to school is positive. In excerpt 5, Patty clearly

positions herself as intentionally outside the *Dietsch* space—she explicitly references an

English-first monolingual ideology in lines 001-006 ("if you're gonna live here, the first thing

you should know is english"). Through indexing this monolingual ideology, Patty positions

herself as Canadian, a category she clearly associates with fluency in English as a primary

language. She has previously positioned herself as primarily fluent in English, since she talked

about Low German only being used for making jokes, rather than being a connection to her

family or heritage as other participants characterized it.

Patty's argument is clearly in direct opposition to what the other participants have

said about the importance of passing Low German on to their children. However, she

mitigates her argument by prefacing it with "in my opinion" in line 001, and then repeatedly

adding the tag question "right" to the components of her argument (in lines 003, 006, 012, 015). She seems to be seeking affirmation for this hard-line stance, but doesn't get it. Instead, after her assertion in lines 014-016 that "german will come naturally" if it is spoken at home, Neta counters in line 017 that her children often don't understand what she is saying if she speaks Low German to them. In this way she contests Patty's dismissive claim that Low German is something that will somehow come naturally.

Patty's attitudes towards Low German are clear in this excerpt—not only is Low German not needed, but rather it is seen as "set[ting people] back" (line 008). At the same time, knowing only Low German is equated with "not know[ing] anything" (line 009-010). Patty's verb choices in talking about English and Low German language acquisition also demonstrate how she is constructing language attitudes. According to Patty, English is something that can and should be taught, while (Low) German is something that can come "naturally" when families speak it at home. Acquisition of English is constructed as learnable and teachable, and therefore also important and valuable—English proficiency is cultural capital. However, acquisition of Low German is constructed as something that doesn't require much action, especially since she also constructs Low German as being neither important nor valuable in the first place.

Patty's assertion that children should first be taught English (lines 013-014) is complicated, however, by the fact that many LGM parents do not speak English themselves, or in the case of the participants in my study, they feel they do not speak it well, making it difficult for them to actively "teach" their children English. This perceived lack of proficiency is coupled with the sinfulness that is associated with English, which in turn results in the

process of acquiring English being more complex than simply teaching or not teaching English. In making this statement about what languages should and should not be spoken, and what language practices should and should not be engaged with, Patty positions herself as able to make this type of judgement, and also aligns herself with a monolingual ideology that rejects the usefulness and value of Low German. By positioning herself as someone who can judge and dismiss the language practices of others, she positions the other women in the group, who do actively teach their children Low German by default as less knowledgeable and able to effectively judge language practices.

Connected to the active vs. passive stance toward language acquisition that Patty sets up is her differentiation between speaking and understanding (lines 014-016), since previously, the importance of speaking Low German in order to keep generations connected to one another has been underlined by participants in excerpt 1b (lines 003-004, 009). Simply "understanding" or "knowing" is not enough for most of the participants—it is important that the children *speak* the language. Patty's differentiation is seen to be unhelpful, as when Neta says "if we speak it in german they don't understand" (line 021). In her response, Neta is countering Patty's construction of Low German as easy for children to learn or naturally acquire.

While for the women learning Low German at home might have "come naturally," since they lived in Mexico, and were surrounded by Low German interactions in all areas of their lives, here in Canada, their children do not have the same experience. The children attend English language public school, and speak English with their peers there, as well as with their neighbours, and are not often required to function in Low German-primary

linguistic situations. The *Dietsch* home space is multilingual, and in many cases, especially for the children, English becomes the dominant language. As such, there is nothing "natural" about the acquisition of Low German—instead it is something that must be taught, and teaching it is a challenge.

At the same time, as we will see in the following excerpt, home is a multilingual space not only because of how language is used, or what associations there are with particular languages and language practices, but because of the conversations that are had *about* language and language use. These conversations, of course, are part of the process required in teaching children a home language, since it isn't enough to simply expose children to a language in order for them to become fluently functioning in that language. LGM children are exposed to multiple languages and, according to their mothers' stories, display a sophisticated understanding of how different behaviours and cultural norms associated with languages impact their use. The following excerpt is from the first focus group discussion, as part of a lengthy discussion in response to a question about what languages the women speak with their children. The primary speakers are Neta and her sister Eva, and Rita. Neta and Eva are recounting different questions about language use that they have received from their children.

Excerpt 6: Laugh in German

```
001   Neta:       that's what my daughter annie when she was::: grade one
002               probably i- i told her that ahm why don't you speak german
003               you forget all your german words you should speak it right↑
004               she said mo:m what should i do when i speak german do i
005               have to >>((smile voice)) look up↑<< hahaha
006   All:        hahaha
```

```
007   Rita:       hahaha i was going to say i used to tell the kids in my

008               class the kids who spoke english look what you've TAUGHT

009               helena right↑ or whatever like i used to give them credit

010               for you're you're teaching helena to speak english they'd

011               say >>((high pitch)) but we don't know how to speak<<

012               >>((smile voice)) [english<<

013   All:                       [hahaha he

014   Rita:       they don't know what [they're talk

015   Neta:                             [they don't know the difference in

016               english and german↓

017   Eva:        and then they ask do we have to laugh in german too↑

018               >>((smile voice)) then↑<< he [he

019   All:                                     [hehehe hahaha

020   Neta:       that's what peter asked once can you laugh in >>((smile

021               voice)) spanish↑<< haha

022   All:        hehehe haha ha
```

Neta's small story about her daughter Annie positions her as an active language

teacher, advising her daughter to speak German so as not to "forget all your german words"

(line 003). At the same time, she positions her daughter, even at six, as a critical language

user, who asks about appropriate behaviours connected to the language—"what should I do

when i speak german do i have to look up?" (line 004-005). It is unclear exactly where this

specific behavioural association might be coming from, since Annie would be regularly seeing

her parents and extended family speaking Low German together, as well as hearing it in

church on Sundays. Annie's question is oriented to with group laughter, which Neta initiates

in line 005.

Rita's small story, told in lines 007-012, further positions LGM children as creative and sophisticated language users, while again constructing school as a space that privileges English. She positions the LGM children in her classes as having the agentive capacity to teach other LGM children English ("look what you've TAUGHT helena" lines 008-009; 010), and positions herself as someone who drew children's attention to this agentive capacity ("i used to give them credit" line 009). Although Rita demonstrates a positive attitude towards multilingual language use, she still constructs school as being a primarily English space, where children need to be "given credit" for using and teaching English. At the same time, Rita positions the LGM children as contesting her positioning them as language teachers—"but we don't know how to speak english" (line 011-012). LGM school children recognize how complicated it is to negotiate between the languages they come into contact with and use, and in Rita's story, they may contest the positioning of a community outsider, despite the fact that English language proficiency is connected to increased linguistic capital, and in turn increases agentive capacity in the public school space.

Rita's story, and Neta's comments in lines 015-016 further illustrate the difficulties especially young children experience in negotiating the different languages they use when they can't tell the languages apart, and recognize the contexts in which one is appropriate and another is not, for example, when an interlocutor does not share the language. It is this negotiation process—learning to tell the difference between languages and learning what language behaviours are appropriate in which contexts—that is referenced by Neta and Eva when they refer to additional questions their children have asked them about appropriate language behaviours.

Because the children come to consult Neta about appropriate language behaviours, Neta positions herself as an expert, someone who knows what behaviours are associated with and appropriate for the different languages the children come into contact with. The group laughter, which functions as a commentary on the children's questions, positions the other participants as also able to evaluate language associated practices too.

The named behaviours—looking up (line 004-005) and laughing (lines 017-018; 020-021)—and the modal verbs that are used in conjunction with the named behaviours further serve to illustrate associations and position the languages in relation to one another. The construction Neta uses in lines 004-005 is "do I have to," which is repeated by Trudi in lines 017-018. A "do I have to" construction indexes obligation, that the speaker is certain that the referenced behaviours are required for full participation in German or *Dietsch*. In lines 020-021, the modal changes to "can I," which changes the association to possibility, rather than requirement. Spanish is the language that Neta's children have the least contact with, having grown up in Canada, so it seems the children extrapolate from their idea that certain behaviours are required for language use, and ask whether a particular behaviour is possible in Spanish.

Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed a series of excerpts in which the participants contest and speak against dominant ideologies of linguistic purism in public places such as church and school when they tell stories of how they use language in these locations. In so doing, they simultaneously speak against the ideologies of the Old Colony Church and *Ordnunk* that Hedges (1996) identified in Mexico, as well as ideologies of linguistic purism in particular

domains such as school in the Canadian context. However, in speaking against these various constraints, the LGM participants construct a *Dietsch* space where multilingual practices are desirable, and flexibility with language increases agentive capacity. At the same time, the *Dietsch* space they construct with their narratives allows for a participant like Patty, who is vocal in her negative opinion about Low German, to position herself as part of the *Dietsch* space. The primary way participants repeatedly affiliate with Patty in these excerpts is through laughter.

The link between laughter and identity is one of fundamental indexicality. Laughing at and laughing with depends on whether the link between a laughable and an identity category is recognized and accepted. As such, *laughing at* becomes *laughing with* through discursive group identity construction. In the cases outlined above, the group laughter is linked to the distinction between two constructed membership categories and the exploitation of the difference. Laughter becomes a tool for the community of practice, in that it constructs group identity and legitimizes the LGM multilingual reality. The crux of this is what constitutes the laughable itself.

A laughable has commonly been understood as part of a particular conversation that results in laughter. As such, it needed to be directly represented in the conversation, for example an utterance, a gesture, or something that occurred in the conversation itself. However, in the cases outlined here, laughter serves as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982) for the constructed difference between two life-worlds, and the laughable is the *tension itself*, rather than something specific in an utterance or gesture that is laughed at precisely because it is an experience shared by all members of the group. Such an expansion of what

constitutes a laughable is important because there are many such instances that are integral

to how groups construct themselves, and how they negotiate membership categorization.

Chapter 6 "Ji meha jiliehet, je meha fitchiehet": Narratives of language learning, literacy, and identity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have discussed the ways in which the LGM women who were a part of my study reported using language, and discussed the attitudes LGMs have towards the variety of languages in their linguascape. Language ideologies connected to English, as perceived by participants were introduced, and will be expanded upon in this chapter. Specifically, in this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the women in my study talk about learning experiences—both their own learning experiences, as well as those of their children, and explore how these learning experiences impact individuals' agentive capacity in different environments.

The centrality of the Low German language to LGM culture and self-conception has already been discussed in this dissertation. In the Canadian context, LGMs must position themselves in relation to English as well. In many ways, English is already part of the LGM linguascape in Mexico, where it is often characterized as representing sinfulness and moving away from the values of the culture (Steiner, 2015). The quote in the title of this chapter, "*Ji meha jiliehet, je meha fitchiehet*," means "the more learned, the more misguided," and is a common LGM proverb related to education and the acquisition of knowledge. The sentiment that change draws people away from God and a life as a "good *Dietsche*" is connected to what takes up the centre position in *Dietsch* space. This is why it is so complicated that upon immigration to Canada, LGMs *must* interact and engage with English, since with the

migration, English transforms from a concept, associated with sin and that which is forbidden, to a language-in-use. Thus, learning to use English in the case of the participants, and learning to use *Dietsch* in the case of their children is central to their experiences after migrating to Canada.

However, the language learning stories the women in my study told about their own experiences are different from the language learning stories they tell about their children—this is at least partly because the languages being learned are different. In their own cases as migrant children, they needed to learn English to function in the Canadian school system. Their children need to learn Low German to function in the *Dietsch* space. The tensions and discomfort in both of these learning experiences play out in Canadian schools, but the stories link home and school as sites where language learning occurs, as has previously been discussed in chapter 5.

Inextricably linked to language learning experiences, specifically learning English, is learning how to read it, and learning how to engage differently with text as a result. This chapter holds together language learning and literacy learning experiences through the analysis of small stories about language learning. The analysis of these stories is divided into two parts—first, I will analyze narratives that the women relate from an adult perspective, reconstructing stories of their own past, and second, I will analyze narratives they tell about their children's experiences, and examine how these two kinds of stories are differently framed in terms of positioning in the *Dietsch* space and the development of agentive capacity.

Whenever I asked questions about the languages LGMs speak, I had participants tell me stories about language learning, most of which are explicitly related to schooling, both in

Mexico and in Canada. For many, especially learning English, which for most of them occurred in Canada, was an experience that was often traumatic, but also liberating. When they talk about learning language, whether it is learning English or teaching their children Low German, they are never talking about just one thing—whether relaying events, context, or discussing their perceptions and emotions. Some of the stories they told in response to questions prompting them to discuss how they had learned the languages they speak resulted in them telling and co-telling stories that do not immediately seem related to questions about learning, but closer analysis shows that they are.

Learning English as migrant children

For the women in my study who migrated to Canada as children, learning English was fraught with tension, as it was a completely new language with words for things that were not talked about in the LGM context. It was also being learned in a location (school) that was viewed fearfully since the way in which school and the purpose of education is conceptualized by LGMs is antithetical to the way school and the purpose of education is conceptualized in the Canadian context (Sneath & Fehr Kehler, 2016). In the following excerpt, which occurs in the first focus group discussion, I asked explicitly about the association with English as a result of the negative experiences they had with the language. For the participants, learning English represented a direct opposition to the desire to maintain good standing within their church community, and as such, a central position in the *Dietsch* space. The following excerpt is an explicit discussion of a number of these conflicting factors, again shared by the group of women who had similar experiences transitioning to school in Canada. The primary speakers are Neta, Greta, and Irma.

Excerpt 1: Learning English

```
001    Int:        if the school experience was so negative what did that make

002                you feel about english↑ was that connected at all↑

003    (0.2)

004    Neta:       not sure wuat dat meent
                   [English translation: what that means]

005    Greta:      like wann du deets (.) wann du sous daut no schol

006                jinks en du soo weinich wisst (.) woo diets woo wea de

007                anglusch dan doa mangk (.) like du deets anglusch

008                lieren (.) jink de daut uk dum wien aul [daut, or
                   [English translation: like when you went to school and knew

                   so little, what was it like to learn english? Was it bad

                   for you?]

009    Neta:                                                    [ja

010    Eva:                                                     [it was really

011                [hard to pick up

012    Neta:       [ons ons ging das ollas sea schlacht wuat wie enna

013                schol taeten everything
                   [English translation: everything we did at school felt bad

                   for us]

014    Greta:      and you don't see that what you're doing there can help you

015                some [day

016    Neta:            [no (.) [that

017    Greta:                   [we don't see that

018    Neta:       that was not for us to learn what they had in school that

019                was something bad for us↓

020    Greta:      yeah it was like sinful things that were happening because

021                it was so out of what you know so you feel a lot of guilt↓

022    Neta:       yeah
```

```
023    Greta:      shame and sadness

024    Neta:       yeah depressed

025    Irma:       °and just angry with people°

026    Greta:      yeah 'cause you don't know what's going on

027    Irma:       no (0.2) why are we here why are we at school

028    Greta:      yeah and the teachers dress so differently than the

029                teachers in mexico↓

030    Irma:       it's not really explained to us

031    Greta:      yeah that's normal but to us it's not and then we feel like

032                (0.2) these people are all like so different and it's not

033                okay for us↑

034    Neta:       and

035    Eva:        it's SCARY

036    Neta:       they thaught us that schools in canada are very bad they

037                learn [very bad things

038    Eva:              [just bad stuff

039    Greta:      yeah they would tell us because they learn things we

040                weren't supposed to learn things we were supposed to just

041                (.) be there
```

Before this excerpt, the participants had talked about their school experiences in Mexico as compared to Canada, which was discussed in more detail in chapter 5. In this excerpt, we have a more explicit discussion about what the women report the experiences of first going to school in Canada felt like for them. They directly connect learning English in the Canadian public school context with putting them at odds with the *Jemeentschaft* (community), and what constitutes the centre of the *Dietsch* space. Specifically, they characterize the learning process itself as problematic in this sense.

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As can be seen in this excerpt, for those women, like Neta, who went to school in

Canada, they were forced to navigate a difficult tension in the *Dietsch* space—the obligations

and expectations of what behaviour constitutes being a "good *Dietsch*." Specifically in this

excerpt, Neta states in line 12-13 "*ons ging das ollas sea schlacht wuat wie enna schol taeten*

everything [*trans.* what we did at school felt bad for us everything]" and repeats in lines 18-19

"that was not for us to learn what they had in school that was something bad for us." The

"bad" Neta refers to is not an implicit language attitude, since Neta is not speaking directly

about the language here, as can be seen when Greta clarifies in line 020-021 that "it was like

sinful things that were happening because it was so out of what you know." Knowledge, here,

is equated with sinfulness, since the more a person knows about anything outside the

Dietsche worldview, the more potential there is for them to be drawn away. Situations and

people that are different from what is at the centre of *Dietsch* space (speaking Low German,

attending church, limiting contact with people outside the church community) are to be

feared and avoided. Anything unknown is associated with being "sinful" (line 020). However,

because of Canadian regulations, the children were sent to secular public schools, where

"everything" (line 013) is unfamiliar and different and as a result, "bad".

School and English are described in the excerpt as "bad" because they represented a

change from what was known and "normal" (line 031) within the *Dietsch* space ("these people

are all like so different and it's not okay for <u>us</u>" line 032-033). What is noteworthy in this

excerpt is the range of emotions this "bad" elicits from the participants who shared the

experience—"guilt" (line 021) "shame and sadness" (line 023), "depressed" (line 024), "angry"

(line 025), "scary" (line 035). What emerges too, is that the women position themselves as

helpless, because "you don't know what's going on" (line 026) and "it's not really explained to

us" (line 030). They are helpless and fearful, and also voiceless—"we weren't supposed to learn things we were supposed to just (.) be there" (line 040-041). This "be[ing] there" positions them as having very low agentive capacity, since they are not supposed to do anything, not even learn.

The code-switching in this excerpt (in lines 004-008 and again in lines 012-013) is notable because of how it validates the conversation itself, and also how it positions the individual participants. Instead of simply not answering the question when she didn't understand it, Neta asked for clarification in Low German ("not sure *wuat dat meent*" [*trans.* not sure what that means] line 004). Asking for clarification makes Neta both invested in the telling that follows, and legitimizes talking about language and the difficulties of learning it. This is important because previously, as described in chapter 3 in my discussion about methodology, participants had expressed confusion about what the value of the project was. In this excerpt, the fact that Neta asks for clarification when she does not understand the question posed legitimizes the conversation on the whole as worth understanding.

Neta's question was not directed at me, since she wasn't aware of how much Low German I spoke. During the first focus group discussion the group as a whole was uncertain how much I knew about anything related to LGM experience and how much Low German I understood. Throughout the focus group discussion, Greta had appointed herself as an ambassador for me, and in lines 005-008, she reframes the question about association with English to a question about English in relation to the school experience. Neta's response to the reframed question in lines 009 and then in lines 012-013 is in Low German, and not translated by anyone. This positions all participants in the conversation as either *Dietsch* speakers or not *Dietsch* speakers, establishing insider-outsider boundaries and underscoring

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the importance of Low German to the centre of *Dietsch* space. Through the Low German, the English question becomes a matter for the group to figure out together first.

In lines 010-011, Eva (who is Neta's sister) responds to the question in English "it was really hard to pick up," presumably meaning English was hard to pick up, but this is neither a direct translation of what Neta said, nor a direct answer to the question as Greta reframed it. Instead, Eva's utterance in line 010-011 can be understood as a response to the question that was originally posed in line 001 "what did that make you feel about english." In this way, Eva positions herself as a flexible multilingual, because she did not need the question reframed in Low German to understand it, like her sister did, and unlike her sister, Eva answers the question in English. Eva characterizes her learning process as "hard" (line 011), but demonstrates agentive capacity in making the choice to answer the question in English during the focus group discussion.

Although no one translates Neta's utterances for me directly, Neta does repeat a version of what she said in Low German in line 012-013 later in lines 018-019: "that was not for us to learn what they had in school that was something bad for us", and again in lines 036-037: "schools in canada are very bad they learn very bad things." In this repetition, Neta emphasizes some of the same words she used in Low German in lines 012-013 "schol" "school" and "schlacht" "bad." Interestingly, Neta ends her Low German utterance in 012-013 with the English word "everything," as a summation "*ons ging das ollas sea schlacht wuat wie enna schol taeten* everything" [*trans.* everything we did at school felt bad for us everything]. In this instance, like in lines 018-019 and 036-037, Neta repeats in English what she has already said in Low German. Given the insider-outsider positioning that occurs through the use of Low German, this repetition of parts of what was said in Low German has the effect of

emphasizing those words in particular, and bringing the non-*Dietsch* speakers back into the conversation.

The insider-outsider positioning in this excerpt is further evident in the shifting use of personal pronouns, especially for those women who have left the Old Colony Church, Greta and Irma. When Neta first answers the question about what school was like, she uses the pronoun "we" ("ons" in Low German) (line 012-013). In Greta's reframing in lines 014-015 she uses a hypothetical "you," ("you don't see that what you're doing there can help you some day") positioning herself as LGM ambassador, explaining and affirming Neta's experience. In her next utterance, however, Greta uses "we" (line 017)—"we don't see that." In the following utterance, Greta switches back to a "you" ("it was so far out of what you know so you feel a lot of guilt" line 021). Through these pronoun choices, Greta flips from insider to outsider, from ambassador to group member. Irma then, in her utterances, uses the "we" pronoun, positioning herself as within the *Dietsch* space in lines 027 and 030. Following Irma's comments, Greta shifts to a "we" pronoun as well, in lines 031-033 and 039-041, and most interestingly for the construction of the *Dietsch* space, uses a "they" pronoun to refer to the Old Colony Church leaders, while continuing to use a "we" pronoun to refer to herself. What is perhaps most interesting about the pronoun use in this excerpt is that there is not one instance of the pronoun "I," making this a collective co-construction of experience. Additionally, the emphasis on collective pronouns indicates that the question was understood as a collective, rather than individual question. This has implications for the construction of *Dietsch* space in this excerpt as being collective rather than individual.

Even when individual participants were telling their own individual stories about language learning, the narratives were collaborative and co-told. The collaborative nature of

this story-telling is important in the construction of *Dietsch* space especially when, as in the following two examples, the story being told is not obviously or directly related to language learning, but instead is constructed as a collective experience because of the feelings engendered and the ways in which participants position themselves and others in those stories. The following excerpt occurs midway through the second focus group discussion, although the story Neta tells is one she repeated in both focus group discussions, as well as her individual interview in response to being asked about learning English. She told a number of these kinds of stories about her initial experiences in school in Canada (we will see a second one in Excerpt 3). Going to school was already complicated for her because in Mexico, she had already finished school[5], and being made to go back to school as a 14-year old felt like the worst kind of infantilization to her. This was further complicated by the fact that she spoke no English and there were no other LGMs her age at the school. At first, she reports, the teachers did not know what to do with her because they couldn't communicate with her, so they just gave her coloured pens and paper so she had something to do. This frustrated her because she was already a grown up in the Old Colony *Jemeentschaft*, and was going back to school to colour.

Other speakers in this excerpt are Greta, who is no longer a member of the Old Colony Church. The other speaker is Julie, who is the non-Old Colony group leader. Additional speakers are sisters Nellie, who has left the Old Colony Church, and Bettie, who continues to be active in the Old Colony Church.

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[5] It is common for LGM children attending the colony schools in Mexico to attend school until age 11 or 12. After that, they are considered "grown up" and expected to contribute to life in the colony through farm and housework (Sneath & Fehr Kehler, 2016).

Excerpt 2: Christmas pageant

```
001   Int:      […] what about the rest of you you said it was awful when

002             you started learning english

003   Neta:     oh i was so scared it was clo close to christmas when we

004             came to canada

005   Int:      mhm

006   Neta:     and we had to go to school right away we didn't speak

007             english we didn't understand anything

008             and then uh we just learned (.) that in mexico too that

009             it's a very big sin to go to canada (.) now my parents went

010             to canada and it's a very big sin↑

011             and we have to go to school and we can't speak their

012             languages and it was uh to uh close before christmas ˚we

013             had a christmas program at school˚ where all the angels

014             came [and

015   All:           [hehehe

016   Nellie:   and [that was for you=

017   Bettie:   =too far

018   Neta:     yeah and i thought that was the end of the world=

019   Int:      oh NO↑

020   Julie:    and you thought it was happening

021   Greta:    we were taught that the angels come when it's the end of

022             the world

023   Neta:     i had to make a bi:g sew a bi:g ah (.) thing

024             i didn't know who it was for

025             and then all of a sudden somebody is standing on a stage

026             and wearing that big thing

027             >>((smile voice)) that i [made<< hehehe

028   All:                               [ha ha ha ha
```

In this excerpt, Neta positions herself as voiceless participant ("we didn't speak english we didn't understand anything" lines 006-007; "we can't speak their languages" lines 011-012) in her narrative, with little agentive capacity. She has no choice in the migration ("now my parents went to canada" line 009-010), or in what she is doing in school ("i had to make a bi:g sew a bi:g ah (.) thing" line 023). Although she takes one action in the narrative, she positions this action as not having been her choice ("i had to [...]sew the big thing" line 023). Otherwise, she positions herself as powerless to act against her fear ("i was so scared" line 003) about her own sinfulness ("it's a very big sin to go to canada" line 009) and about the end of the world (line 018), and she connects this powerlessness directly to her inability to speak "their languages" (lines 011-012).

It is significant that Neta revisits this story numerous times—in both focus group discussions and in her individual interview—in response to questions about her experiences with English when she first came to Canada. In fact, this is Neta's third retelling of the story on tape. This narrative about feeling like she was experiencing the end of the world is clearly linked to learning English for her, precisely because she retells this story so many times without direct prompting. In having been made to produce costumes for the Christmas pageant, Neta positions herself as complicit in bringing about the end of the world. The fact that she re-tells this story multiple times when asked about learning English, indicates that there are parallels for her between how she positions herself in the narrative, as voiceless and powerless, and how she positions herself in relation to learning English.

Neta's pronoun use constructs distinct membership categories—"we," who recently came to Canada and "didn't speak english" or "understand anything" (lines 006-007), and "they," who speak "their languages" (line 011-012). The collective use of the "we"-pronoun is of

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note here, since it establishes the narrative as a collective experience, as in the previous excerpt. This collective experience is oriented to by the participants with group laughter in line 15 and again in line 028. Neta uses a singular pronoun in line 003 "i was so scared," line 018 "i thought it was the end of the world," line 024 "i didn't know who it was for" to talk about her feelings of powerlessness, and again to talk about the action she took in the narrative in lines 023 "i had to make a bi:g sew a bi:g ah (.) thing" and line 027 "that i made." Neta never specifically defines who she means when referring to "they," but because she was still able and continued to use her comfortable language at home, it seems that this "they" refers to the people in the public Canadian spaces she was made to inhabit.

In this excerpt, it is possible to see the religious tension introduced in relation to the previous excerpt. Neta reports believing that the end of the world was coming in this narrative (line 018) because she was primed to, since the world ending is logically connected to what are perceived to be sinful choices. The very fact they were in Canada at all was "a very big sin"—a fact which she repeats for emphasis (lines 009-010). She positions her parents as having the agentive capacity to make the choice to bring the family to Canada ("now my parents went to canada" line 009-010), but the choice to come to Canada positions her parents and Neta by extension at the periphery of the *Dietsch* space, since the choice is such a "sin."

This narrative represents a clash between what Neta and others had previously been taught, and the learning of new information that does not fit into the frame of reference that they have based on what they have been taught. For example, Neta reports having been taught that Canada was a sinful place, and as we saw in the previous excerpt, that school was also a sinful place ("and then uh we just learned (.) that in mexico too that it's a very big sin

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to go to canada" line 008-009). This knowledge comes into conflict with Neta's action of sewing being positioned as a part of the sinfulness. Ordinarily, sewing, when done well, would account for cultural capital within the *Dietsch* space. Greta explains that Neta's fear that the world was ending comes from previous teachings ("we were taught that when the angels come it's the end of the world" lines 021-022). In Neta's narrative, her fear is connected to her inability to connect what she is experiencing to anything she knows. Of course, she is reporting an experience she had when she was 14, and she comments on her fear through laughing in line 027, which the group joins in line 028.

During the first focus group discussion, Neta told a second story in relation to learning English, after first talking about her Christmas pageant story. This second story was about a field trip she took with her class to Niagara Falls, the spring after she came to Canada. There are two important co-constructors in this story who were present during the first focus group discussion who were not present for the second. The first co-constructor for Neta's narrative is her sister, Eva, who, like Neta, remains a part of the Old Colony Church, and was also connected to the CAPC group before she and her family moved away. She happened to be visiting around the time I wanted to conduct the first focus group discussion, so Neta invited her to come. Her presence is important because being only a few years younger than Neta, she experienced similar, and sometimes even the same events, which they then co-construct, correct and reshape in their telling. Although Eva doesn't speak much during the following excerpt, her presence alone is important because of her involvement in Neta's experiences (cf. Goffman, 1981).

The second person who is a significant co-constructor in Neta's story is Gina, who was present for the first focus group discussion (but not for the second). Gina was the only non-

LGM member of the group who attended regularly. While she was connected to Mennonites through part of her family's Swiss Mennonite background, she knew very little about the cultural or religious context that LGM women live with, and I never heard her ask very many questions about this context, despite knowing many of the women for a number of years at the time I began attending the group. Both Neta and Greta, as well as other speakers, such as Irma, engage with this lack of knowledge and lack of understanding of context by adding different levels of evaluation in the co-construction of the narrative, because they feel they have to explain more details and information.

The following story, told in the first focus group discussion, follows the initial telling of the Christmas pageant story, which Neta tells again in the second focus group interview, as portrayed above in excerpt 2. The primary speakers are Neta herself, Greta, Irma, and Gina.

Excerpt 3: Fun house

```
001  Neta:      and then (0.2) in the summer time ah yeah it was more at
002             the summer time we went for a vacation we went to niagara
003             falls and i didn't speak english but the girls they led me
004             through the (0.2)
005  Gina:      °falls?°
006  Neta:      the dark rooms↑ what is that is it
007  Gina:      oh:: those fun houses?
008  Neta:      YEAH
009  Gina:      oh[::
010  Eva:         [hehe
011  Neta:      i didn't know what was going on so they just held onto my
012             hand and i [couldn't even see↓
013  Gina:                 [yeah niagara falls
014  Neta:      i couldn't see the girl that was holding on to my hand↓
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```
015   Gina:       and then you thought it was the end of the world [too

016   Neta:                                                  [>>((smile

017               voice)) yeahhhh<< hehe and i was screaming like CRAZY and i

018               didn't know what was going on↓

019   Gina:       how horrible

020   Neta:       it was very scary [that's how i

021   ?:                          [hehe

022   Gina:                        [all these new [experiences in

023               canada

024   Neta:                                      [yeah hehe

025   Eva:        heh

026   Gina:       that's horrible↓

027   Int:        were you were you the only low german family in the school↑
```

At the time of the first focus group discussion, the group was unclear about how much I knew or didn't know about the LGM context, and hadn't decided what to make of me yet, so it is likely that the explanations and evaluations are just as much for my benefit as for Gina's. These evaluations are less directed at Julie and Rita (the non-LGM group facilitators), because all of the regular attendees had already developed relationships of trust with those two women.

The small story about the funhouse is metaphorically significant to Neta's construction of her English language learning experiences in a number of ways. This story echoes the voicelessness and fear of the Christmas pageant story. Although Neta vocalizes the fear in this story ("i was screaming like CRAZY" line 017), she describes herself in that moment as not having any words, only the screaming to express her fear. Similarly to the Christmas pageant story, there are no explanations for what is happening to her. When they talked about their migration experience earlier in the focus group discussion, Neta and her

sister Eva talked about how there was only one other LGM family at the school they went to, and the children were much younger, so there was no one to explain to her what was going on. In this story, however, the terror is compounded by the fact that Neta "[can't] even see" (line 012). There are similar complications here to the Christmas pageant story, since funhouses are filled with illusions and things that are not "real," (like the angels) in the way that Neta would have been used to.

A significant difference in the funhouse story as compared to the Christmas pageant story, however, is the presence of other people. In the Christmas pageant story, Neta describes herself as alone with her terror—there are people on the stage wearing the clothes that she made, but she doesn't talk about anyone else she would have been watching the pageant with. In the story, she is alone in the audience, alone witnessing the end of the world, separated from any other people. In the funhouse story, however, Neta is not alone. Although there is no explanation for what is happening to her, and she is similarly terrified, there is someone holding her hand ("so they just held on to my hand" line 011) which she then specifies "i couldn't see the girl that was holding on to my hand" (line 014).

Another difference between the two stories is the reaction of the group of listeners and co-tellers to the story. Excerpt 2 took place during the second focus group discussion where the majority of the listeners are also LGMs who have had similar experiences related to English language learning. In excerpt 2, the co-construction of Neta's story includes a significant amount of group laughter, especially when Neta expresses how terrified she was during the event. In excerpt 2, the laughter functions as a group constituting mechanism (Glenn, 2003). Specifically, it functions as an expression of solidarity—while the other women may not have experienced exactly the same thing, they have their own stories about attending

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school in Canada that were scary and made them feel foolish. The laughter is a comment on the similarity of experience, and a way of contesting the feelings of powerlessness associated with this and similar stories. They are choosing to co-construct this narrative and connect their own experiences to this one—laughing *at* the pain and confusion becomes a laughing *with* one another (Glenn, 2003), because Neta joins in with the group laughter as well.

In Excerpt 2, on the other hand, the group does not have the same opportunity to co-construct and position themselves in an empowering way because Gina continuously comments on "how horrible" things must have been for Neta. Although Neta and the others laugh in this excerpt as well (lines 010, 016, 024), Gina repeats her assessment of the story (lines 019, 026), and never joins in the laughter herself. The fact that Gina does not join in the laughter positions her as an outsider in this conversation; she does not orient to the stories in the way that the women who share the experience do. At the same time, Gina functions as a co-teller in this excerpt in a number of ways. First, she provides potential tokens for a word search ("falls?" line 005, and "oh:: those fun houses?" line 007). Second, she draws a parallel between the Christmas pageant story and the funhouse story in terms of how the experience made Neta feel ("and then you thought it was the end of the world too" line 015). These contributions position her as a co-teller. She also, as previously mentioned, evaluates the story by repeating how "horrible" the experience must have been for Neta (lines 019, 026), but these evaluations position her as an outsider again.

For Neta, her own school experiences were not presented as positive in her narratives, in part, I would argue, because she positions herself as having little agentive capacity in connection to what was happening to her. The fact that her English language proficiency was not adequate for her to grasp what was happening around her was complicated by the fact

that the new experiences she was having did not fit into the frame of reference that she had

for what was acceptable and what was not. She experienced a significant amount of guilt from

her socialization in Mexico that the very act of existing in Canada was inherently sinful. This

in turn was coupled with the fact that she was being made to attend school after she had

already finished school in Mexico, and the embarrassment of being made to feel like a small

child again. Taken together, these factors underscore her position of having little agentive

capacity in both stories.

By her own admission, in response to the question "when did you feel comfortable

using English?," Neta never learned to speak "proper" English until long after she finished

school and her husband was hospitalized. The experience of her husband being in hospital

seems to have necessitated her learning English in a way none of her previous experiences

had. The experiences and supports she had at school apparently never helped her achieve the

English proficiency she needed.

Learning Low German as a heritage language

Neta frequently talked about learning English, and making sense of Canadian culture

with which she came into contact in school and other public places being a struggle for her,

as can be seen in the previous excerpts. The way she presents her own children's experiences

in the Canadian school system is quite different however, as can be seen in the following

excerpt. For the children, it is not the process of learning English that is the problem the

same way it was for their mothers. Instead, for the children, the focus becomes the process of

learning Low German. Fluency in Low German is integral to taking up a central position in

the *Dietsch* space, and participating fully in Old Colony Church and the *Jemeentschaft* more

broadly. LGM children who are growing up in Canada have more obstacles to learning Low

German, especially given the relatively low linguistic capital Low German has in the broader Canadian context than their mothers did. While the process of learning English is positioned as putting individuals in tension with their church and *Jemeentschaft*, away from the centre of the *Dietsch* space, the process of learning Low German for the children is positioned as bringing them closer to the centre of this same space.

The following excerpt also occurs during the second focus group discussion I conducted, and is a return to an earlier discussion about languages the children speak, but this time in relation to official English-only school policy, which complicates things considerably. The speakers in this excerpt are Justina, who is still an active member of the Old Colony Church, who has one child in school, Neta, who has 5 children in school, Greta, who is no longer a part of the Old Colony Church, and Rita and Julie, who are the non-Old Colony group leaders.

I have divided the following excerpt into two parts so that I can first discuss the context of the language ban it introduces, and the privilege of written text over oral language inherent in the language ban, and then move on to discuss the women's reaction to the language ban. In the first excerpt, Justina, who has previously talked about how important it is for her to speak Low German with her children (see chapter 5), points to the policy at the elementary school her children attend that forbids speaking languages other than English at school. She, like the other parents, had recently received a letter from the administration to tell children to refrain from speaking languages other than English at school.[6] As a language and education researcher, when I first heard about the English-only rules that were being

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[6] The women in my study had their children at three different area schools, and two of the schools made similar rules about language use for similar reasons.

enforced at the two schools, I was horrified, as research has repeatedly shown that forbidding

home languages in the school setting is detrimental to children's linguistic development (e.g.,

Blommaert & van Avermaet, 2008; Cummins, 2013). It was especially alarming to me because

the women and I had often spoken about how difficult it was to motivate their children to use

Low German, and how complicated their feelings about this dilemma was. The following

excerpts occur right after Greta has just finished discussing how important she thinks it is for

LGM children to learn to communicate in Low German. The tension was running somewhat

high, it is worth noting, because of Patty's vocal opinions about the uselessness of Low

German (as previously discussed in chapter 5). "The language" referred to by the interviewer

in line 001 is Low German.

Excerpt 4a: Piece of paper

```
001   Int:        what about what about the rest of you↑ do you think it's

002               important to pass on the language↑

003   Justina:    i [think so↓

004   Greta:        [yeah

005   Neta:         [yeah

006   Justina:    to me [it is↓

007   Patty:      only if [you live in mexico

008   Justina:            [we are german and it's- the kids have to learn to

009               talk to ah speak or whatever like ah i just know (.)

010               pennsylvania dutch the other mennonites speak pennsylvania

011               du:tch (.) i think they're really (.) really serious about

012               that their kids speak their language at home 'cause i think

013               they're speaking that language i think at school i think

014               just to fun- making fun of another↓ and THEN (.) and then

015               they had a piece of paper °at home°↓ (0.2) we just uh
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016              like we should tell our kids to speak uh (.) english at
017              school↑ and (0.2) ah i think just to make fun of like with
018              the kids (.) there are two different languages like uh
019              german and they make fun of each other↓
020   Int:       oh so they use the language [to
021   Justina:                                [mhm:
022   Int:       umm
023   Rita:      secret talks
024   Int:       bull bully the other children↓
025   Justina:   mhm
026   Int:       oh
```

In Excerpt 4a, Justina positions LGMs as different than Conservative Mennonites of
Swiss descent who speak Pennsylvania German. (These are likely to be David Martin
Mennonites, as most other conservative Swiss groups do not send their children to public
school.) Justina positions the latter as "really really serious" about teaching their children
their language (line 011), and implies that the Pennsylvania German speakers are the
instigators of the problem that has resulted in the German language ban since "they're
speaking that language at school" (line 011-012). The conservative Mennonites who speak
Pennsylvania German at home are positioned as having agentive capacity and able to
successfully teach their children the language. This is significant because of the number of
times the women pointed out and talked about how difficult it is to teach their children Low
German—the conservative Mennonites are positioned as not sharing the difficulties.

However, all of the German speakers, whether Low German or Pennsylvania German,
use their languages to "make fun of another" (line 014), something Justina repeats in line 019.
This repetition emphasizes what the school has identified as the problem (children "making

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fun" of one another). More significantly, this active verb positions the children as having significant agentive capacity in this situation.

As we saw in chapter 5, Justina talked a number of times about how difficult it was to encourage her children to speak Low German at home, and the repeated struggle between mothers and children in getting their children to speak the home language at all, and the connected struggle to get the children to value the language the same way their mothers do. When asked whether the women think that passing on Low German to their children is important, the answer is quick, and a number of speakers overlap one another in their answer (Justina, line 003, Greta, line 004, Neta, line 005)—yes, it is important because "we are german" (line 008). The explicit positioning as "german" in line 008 is in response to Patty's assertion in line 007 that Low German is only important "if you live in mexico," and Justina's use of the "we" pronoun again constructs the *Dietsch* space as collaborative, and includes Patty in the space, regardless of what her feelings might be about speaking Low German.

In claiming Low German as important, the participants position themselves as home language teachers whose job it is to "pass on" (line 001) and maintain their home language. This positioning is in direct juxtaposition to the task that the school set out for them—that they "should tell [their] kids to speak ah (.) english" (line 016). These conflicting responsibilities create tensions for the women, because the linguistic hierarchies of the different locations of school and home are at odds and clash in this situation. The clash emphasizes the differences in approach to education in comparison to mainstream Canadian culture—specifically in this case maintaining the boundaries of their culture vs. promoting pluralism and assimilation (Sneath & Fehr Kehler, 2016).

The way in which the language ban was communicated to families comes up very specifically in this excerpt in lines 014-017. The "piece of paper" that Justina references constructs the school as a space where written texts govern the behaviour and linguistic practices that parents are meant to be encouraging in their children, even in their home space. School is a space governed by pieces of paper and a variety of other specific texts. The appearance of the piece of paper in the home space extends the influence of the school into the home sphere, thus blurring the lines between home and school and complicating the agentive capacity in both spaces.

It is worth noting the irony of the language policing in this context, since language use and community regulation of language use was one of the most significant factors in the decision for members of the Old Colony community to leave Canada in the first place. In their own parochial schools, the official language is Mennonite High German because the texts are in Mennonite High German, and colony school is so closely associated with the religious ("sindeosche", literally: "Sunday-like") realm. Officially, Low German is not intended to be a part of the school setting, although in practice, there is a tendency for both children and teachers to use Low German for a variety of reasons (Hedges, 1996; Sneath & Fehr Kehler, 2016). The LGMs originally left Canada because they felt their right to educate their children was being encroached upon by Canadian lawmakers, and because of the close connection of schooling to church for this community, it was acutely felt as religious persecution, as has been previously discussed. Now, the rules about language use are taken up differently, however, as can be seen in these excerpts.

LGM children make up a good portion of the student populations at the schools to which both Justina and Neta send their children, which is different from Neta's own school experiences, where there were few other LGMs in the community. Despite the difference in student population, in both Neta's stories earlier and in excerpt 4a, the school space is constructed as having English-speaking at the centre. The primary difference between how Neta constructs the school space in the narratives about her own experience, and how she and Justina co-construct the school space in talking about their children is the amount of agentive capacity retained by the children. Specifically, the ways in which the different kinds of Mennonite children construct Mennonite space at school is to contest the centrality of English, using their home languages to "make fun of another" (line 014, 019). When I as the interviewer re-characterize the behaviour using the stronger word "bully" to describe the behaviour in line 024, Justina agrees in line 025. Pennsylvania German and Low German then jostle for the centre of the Mennonite space in the school context. Both groups contest the centrality of the other to the space through actively using their "two different languages like ah german" (lines 018-019) to "make fun" (line 014, 019) and "bully" (line 024) one another in an environment where they "should be" speaking English.

The conversation continues in excerpt 4b, when Neta outlines what the outcome of the language ban has been at the school her children attend. Neta received the same "piece of paper" that Justina talked about in excerpt 4a. In line 027, Neta responds to the earlier more negative re-characterization of the children's behaviour.

Excerpt 4b: Speaking German better

```
027   Neta:        that's why my kids speak german better now

028   Int:         heh [heh heh >>so it was an incentive ((laughing
```

```
029              voice))<<

030   Rita:        [heh heh

031   Neta:     they were not supposed to speak german at ((name of

032             school)) they they they were not speaking very good

033             until they went to ((name of school)) and there they

034             were not sup<u>posed</u> to speak german↑

035   Int:      okay

036   Neta:     but now they speak german much bett[er↓

037   Julie:                                       [huh huh huh huh

038             huh

039   Int:      >>((smile voice))ok[(h)ay<<

040   Neta:                        [heh heh heh heh

041   Greta:                       [but once they made it a RULE then

042             it was like OOOhkay we're not supposed to let's=

043   Neta:     =yeah

044   All:      haha[ha ha
```

In the small story in this excerpt, Neta positions her children very differently from
how she positioned herself in Excerpt 1, 2, and 3. While she did not have much agentive
capacity in her own school experience, and language was a mechanism that excluded her and
rendered her voice- and powerless, she positions her children as actively employing language
as a mechanism, delineating group membership and belonging in a way that contests what
has been established as the norms for the centre of the space, because she specifically
mentions that the childrens' Low German proficiency improved once the school had expressly

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forbidden them to use it ("that's why my kids speak german better now" lines 027; 031-034; 036).

There is quite a bit of laughter in Excerpt 4b, but it is worth noting that it is not laughter taken up by the entire group, like we have seen in previous excerpts—the people laughing in Excerpt 4b are the interviewer, and Julie and Rita, the three people who are not connected to the LGM community through heritage. Neta presents the fact that her children now speak Low German better than they did before without a smile voice or a hint of laughter, and she does not join in with the laughter until the very end of the excerpt, when Greta has reframed the story as typical "kid" behaviour in response to a rule ("but once they made it a RULE then it was like OOOhkay we're not supposed to let's" lines 041-042). For Neta and for Justina, the two mothers whose children attended schools where Low German was expressly forbidden, the edict made it complicated to enforce Low German at home. However, according to their mothers, the effect of the language ban is that the children speak Low German both in and outside of school now, and with a higher proficiency level.

Both Low German and Pennsylvania German are low status languages in Canada as a whole, by virtue of being primarily oral and spoken by a relatively small minority population. Pennsylvania German has been more widely researched than Mennonite Low German overall (cf. Moelleken, 1983; Louden, 1993; Schlegel, 2012; Keiser, 2014), and there are also more print resources available in Pennsylvania German than in Mennonite Low German. However, in both cases, these print resources are still fairly limited, in part because both Pennsylvania German and Low German can best be categorized as primarily oral languages. As a result, both languages are often characterized as dialects by community outsiders, as well as non-

linguist researchers, a categorization which inherently devalues and reduces the languages (although the speakers themselves refer to them as languages, as in Excerpt 4a line 018).

Research on the oral nature of many indigenous languages in Canada has shown that primarily oral languages do not tend to be valued as highly in the Canadian context as more text-based languages, and further, that English is positioned as more highly valued than other languages (cf. Hulan & Eigenbrod, 2008; Ricento, 2013). Extrapolating these findings to non-indigenous languages that share the characteristic of being primarily oral, Pennsylvania German and Low German are languages that are positioned far from the centre of the Canadian space. That is, these Germanic varieties are positioned as having low linguistic capital until they bump up against one another in rural Ontarian schools, and then they are used to position speakers at the centre and periphery of Mennonite spaces and increase the linguistic capital of the children who use them (cf. Giampapa, 2004). In the school space, they become powerful tools of membership categorization and group delineation for the children who speak them, especially since most of the teachers and the administration of the schools do not speak the languages at all.

The narratives in the different excerpts presented in this chapter demonstrate a variety of orientations towards language learning. These orientations result in different ways of positioning the actors in the narratives, based on their flexibility with the languages, and the attitudes that the actors hold and display towards the languages they are learning. Neta positions her children as linguistically flexible (line 033-036), being able to move fluidly between the languages in their linguascape. Her children do not experience the same voicelessness that she did when she was going to school. Neta presents learning Low German as a process that connects her children and gives them access to the *Dietsch* space. Neta and

most of the women I spoke to talked about how important they felt it was that their children learn Low German to connect them to their families and their heritage (see chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of this question). At the same time, they talked about how much of a struggle it is for them to maintain Low German with their children at home, at least in part because they themselves do not speak English as well as their children do, and their children prefer to speak English. However, the children intentionally acquired Low German when it came time to assert their group membership in school.

Furthermore, Neta positions her children as contesting the precise social structures that rendered her voiceless when she was a child. English dominates the Canadian public school space. When Neta went to school, it was because she and her siblings were the only Low German speakers. They couldn't effectively contest the positions they were taking up within that space until they were able to do so in English. In the public school Neta's children attend, English is the dominant language because of school policy that intentionally marginalizes home languages ("they had a piece of paper at home we just ah like we should tell our kids to speak ah (.) english at school" Excerpt 4a, lines 015-017). In fact, from the description of the school and the existence of the policy, there are more speakers of other languages represented in the school than English monolinguals. Actively using Low German (or Pennsylvania German, for that matter), then, is a voicing act and a declaration of identity—a way of contesting the available positions within the school space.

For their part, the LGM children, as well as their conservative Mennonite counterparts, use language in the public school space as a way to assert their identities, contesting not only the dominant Canadian discourses about the value of oral vs. written language, but also subverting structures and value systems in their own cultures. This identity

work plays out in the public school space in ways not intended by teachers and administrators at their schools. What results for these families who speak a primarily oral language in their homes is that their children seem to connect with their home language (Low German, in this case) and take ownership over the language and their use of their language in ways these children had previously not done.

Although Neta positions herself as voiceless, and her children as reflective and adaptable managers of their linguistic and cultural repertoires, Neta tells all of these stories in English. A lack of English proficiency kept her silenced and fearful in her early days in Canada. However, today, the very fact that Neta tells these stories about herself and her children *in English* to a university researcher positions her as the same kind of flexible multilingual that she positions her children to be. The English language learning process that was so fraught and painful for Neta when she was initially experiencing it has become an integral part of how she engages with and constructs the *Dietsch* space, because English has become part of the multilingual language practices that connect her to her children. The co-construction in Neta's narratives makes them collaborative stories. The co-telling and orientation through laughter, for example, connect the different participants in their shared experiences as migrant children, as well as in their shared experiences as mothers engaged in teaching their children a home language that connects them to their family and their heritage.

Chapter 7 *Spesearen enn mensajes schriewen*: Texting as literacy practice

Introduction

The word "spesearen" is a crucially important one in the LGM context. Although speakers of German might recognize a direct translation as "spazieren" (to go for a walk), this is not what it means in the LGM context. "Spesearen" accounts for a majority of different social practices that serve to construct the *Dietsch* space—this term is widely applied to interactive communication practices that serve to establish and maintain relationships within the *Dietsch* context. It is used to refer to visiting with family, sharing the latest news with neighbours, and even courting between men and women. Texting has become an important *spesearen* practice—a way in which LGMs stay connected across borders and boundaries. It is how they share information quickly, make plans, and update family and friends about developments in their lives, whether those people are in Drayton, Ontario, or Zacatecas, Mexico. The Low German term for texting is "mensajes schriewen," taking one component "mensajes" (messages) from Spanish, and one component "schriewen" (writing) from Low German. This multilingual term is indicative of the multilingual practice that texting has become for LGMs.

Although I wasn't expecting it, texting became a frequent topic of conversation among the women in the group, both in the focus group discussions, but also in individual interviews and during group meetings. Texting has emerged in my data as a multilingual, creative practice that is reflective of the multilingual LGM reality, and as Pertierra (2002) found, allows for the expansion of the face-to-face interactions. The following excerpts will expand

on this idea to demonstrate that texting is a situated literacy practice that serves to construct the *Dietsch* sociolinguistic space.

In this chapter, I will analyze the ways in which my participants talk about the creative and multilingual ways they communicate via text messages. Texting has become a practice that bridges speaking and writing in a way that allows individuals whose primary language is oral to communicate in that language via written word. For LGMs, texting is an empowering literacy practice that provides them the flexibility to give and receive meaning in a multimodal, multilingual way while at the same time serving to construct *Dietsch* space as one that connects LGMs who are geographically far away from one another in ways they were not able to do with the same immediacy before the affordances of texting.

Texting as literacy practice: Theoretical considerations

Texting is a communicative practice that has become imbedded into daily life, across economic and cultural divides. Globally, according to a Pew Research Study, approximately 88% of adults report owning a cellphone, with 43% of these being smartphones (Poushter, 2016). In Canada, the national average of smartphone possession is 67% of adults. The same Pew study found that texting was the primary way cell phones were used, especially across developing nations. There have been studies in education on the effects of texting on literacy development (cf. Zebroff & Kaufmann, 2016). In addition, in linguistics and anthropology, studies have paid special attention to how primarily oral cultures interact with this technology (cf: Muller, Janks, & Stiles, 2015; Pertierra, 2002, 2005; Kiboda, 2009).

In his work, Pertierra (2002) found that the primarily oral group he studied in the Philippines placed a high value on face to face interactions, and that the practice of texting

served to reconfigure how relationships within the group could be maintained by expanding

the oral culture outside of geographical boundaries (p. 607). He suggests that one of the

primary reasons for this in texting and not in other forms of digital communication (such as

writing emails) is the fact that texting comes much closer to oral conversation in that the

"rules" about what can be written and how, are more flexible than other forms of written

communication (p. 92). These findings are echoed by Lexander (2010, 2011) in her work on

multilingual texting practices in Senegal. Lexander makes the argument that employing

different languages allows individuals to foreground different aspects of their identities.

These findings allow us contextualize how LGM participants talk about their texting practices

in terms of technology, orality, and multilingualism.

The context of texting among LGMs

Hedges (1996) outlines literacy practices that are of integral importance to colony life

in Mexico. These literacy practices include memorization and repetition of the catechism,

letter writing, and recipe and list writing. Hedges argues that these literacy practices are

group and community constituting. I argue that although these practices are group

constituting in Mexico, they are not group constituting to the same effect in Canada, not least

because factors such as geographical distance between people directly impacts how they

practice community and construct *Dietsch* space. Since Hedges published her dissertation in

1996, there have also been significant changes in available technology, and in the acceptance

of these technologies in Mexican colony life. Technologies such as cell phones and texting

have become crucial components in connecting far flung family members from across the

Americas (Turner, 2013).

Texting is a digital practice of place that serves a group-constituting function both at a broad level connecting individuals who are geographically separated, but also at the discursive level. Texting is a literacy practice that may not necessarily be immediately associated with LGMs because of misconceptions of their religious conservatism affecting their use of available technology. However, it is a widely used literacy practice that connects the *Dietsch* space across geographic realities in the same way that Loewen (2013) has written that Mennonite publications do (see chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion).

Texting serves to construct a virtual space that transcends the confines of physical location—connecting Durango and Chihuahua, Mexico, with Taber, Alberta and Aylmer, Ontario. Texting serves as a manifestation of the "imagined village" Loewen (2013) writes about, a practice of place that serves to construct *Dietsch* space as the following excerpts will demonstrate; this form of written communication serves as a vital group constituting practice. Texting serves to construct a translanguaging space (Li, 2011), which allows for creative language use and for participants to position themselves and others at the centre or the periphery of the *Dietsch* space, and thus contest the positioning at the same time.

Talking about texting is talking about solidarity, demonstrating shared experience in a discursive, collaborative way. Texting as a literacy practice among LGMs challenges the categories of "should be" and "reality," introduced in the discussion about language attitudes (see chapter 5). This is because *Dietsch* space is a space in which participants can use language flexibly and creatively in a way that allows them to fully communicate ideas and information with others in an authentic and genuine way. Texting allows LGMs to engage in a literacy practice that they would not necessarily claim any level of comfort or familiarity with.

Texting is both reading and writing, but because it is constructed as a much less rule-governed practice compared to writing letters or recipes (which were identified by Hedges as important practices), and more like conversation, participants orient towards it as an experience that allows them to communicate using all of their linguistic resources and language systems, while actively positioning themselves within the *Dietsch* space. This chapter has been organized according to the main themes that participants brought up in relation to texting, which are all interconnected, and reflective of language attitudes that have been discussed previously. The primary difference when it comes to texting is the way in which multilingual practices are described and positively connotated, actively contesting being positioned as "illiterate" or having insufficient linguistic resources to communicate with one another.

First, I will discuss how the participants talk about texting in terms of the strategies and resources they use to accomplish it. Second, I will discuss the agentive capacity they demonstrate in making choices about what languages they use and how these are dependent on their interlocutors. I will end by discussing a co-told narrative about two people communicating via text, and analyze how this story reporting on texting practices pulls together different language attitudes and ways of positioning that have been discussed in this dissertation.

Texting as creative language use

Texting is constructed by participants as a creative multilingual literacy practice, and they position themselves as creative multilingual language users. Excerpt 1 is from the first focus group discussion. What was interesting to me at the time was that this entire discussion

ensued after a question about reading, in connection to the difference between reading and writing in different languages (more specifically, the original question from the interviewer: "what was it like to learn how to read?"). Texting had not been addressed at all by the interviewer, but it was oriented to by all participants, and was one of the first indications to me that literacy is inextricably linked to *Dietsch* identity, because texting (a situated literacy practice) was discussed extensively when participants were asked what languages they *speak*. For the LGM participants in my study, "what languages do you speak?" is not a simple question at all—not only is it not just a question about language itself, but it is a question of linguistic practice, and further, it is a question about the construction of the *Dietsch* sociolinguistic space and how participants position themselves within that space.

The primary speakers in this excerpt are Greta, Neta, and Rita. The end of this excerpt has been previously introduced in chapter 4 in the discussion of the perception of literacy among LGMs. In this excerpt, participants are discussing the variety of multilingual strategies they use when they are texting with one another, and it gives insight into how they position themselves and into their use of those multilingual practices, contesting the idea that there is a "should be" vs. "reality" when it comes to texting practices.

Excerpt 1: It's all brainwork

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001   Int:        why do you text your mother-in-law in high german↑

002   Neta:       well she texts me in high german↓

003   Rita:       because she doesn't know [english]

004   Neta:                                [she doesn't

005   Int:        does she not speak low german↑

006   Neta:       ja
```

```
007   Rita:     SPEAKing low german [it's not a writ(h)ten lang(h)uage

008             hehehehe]

009   Int:                       [but she doesn't write↑

010   Greta:    so when texting became a thing uh you just pull out

011             whatever's in there for the writing

012   Int:      [for the low german

013   Greta:    [yeah some people know a little bit of spanish and (.)

014             'cause you can't really put what's here ((points to

015             forehead)) in here ((mimes holding smartphone))

016   Rita:     right

017   Greta:    so- so for the mom- the mother in law she- she probably

018             with her years of reading the bible has learned how to

019             write a few words in high german and that's all she

020             knows how↓ (0.2) and if you look at it and read it- like

021             i can read it when someone sends me a high german text↓

022   Neta:     and then if you copy what she says to you

023   All:      hahahahuhuhu

024   Neta:     you can write back

025   All:      hahahahahihi

026   Greta:    basically it's all brainwork↓ (.) you figure out what

027             they're trying to say- you take the subject of what

028             you're talking about and then you figure it out (.)

029             any open-minded person can do that but if you're a

030             written text person it would be hard to figure out

031             what she is saying↓
```

In this excerpt, Greta and Neta describe some of the different strategies that LGMs use when texting—"pull[ing] out whatever's in there for the writing" (lines 010-011), "look at it and read it" (line 020), and "copy what she says to you" (line 022). These strategies are connected to active verbs—"pull" (line 010), "write" (lines 019, 024), "look" (line 020), "read" (line 020, 021), "copy" (line 022), "figure out" (lines 026, 028, 030). Through the use of these active verbs, these strategies index increased agentive capacity and linguistic flexibility, the latter of which is emphasized by Greta's positioning LGMs as "open-minded" (line 029).

The literacy practice of texting increases LGM agentive capacity to be able to communicate on their terms, and a way of getting around the imbalance inherent in the way reading and writing are understood and interpreted in the Canadian context. A primary purpose of texting is to give and receive information, and as such, the rules governing texting are less stringent than those governing other writing modalities. As the participants say, you can use English or Spanish (line 013) or Mennonite High German (line 002), you can use a variety of strategies, such as copying words or phrases from the sender's text into your reply (line 022). In other words, texting creates a virtual space where strict rules governing what constitutes literacy (both reading text and producing it) are suspended, allowing people to communicate with one another with "whatever's in there" (line 011).

Another purpose of texting, as discussed by Lexander (2010, 2011) and Pertierra (2002), is to emphasize different aspects of a texter's identity. Neta says she texts her mother-in-law in (Mennonite) Mennonite High German because her mother-in-law "texts [Neta] in Mennonite High German" (line 002). Neta positions herself as able to text in Mennonite High German, as does Greta "like i can read it when someone sends me a mennonite high german

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text" (line 020-021). In order to be able to respond to the text, Neta and Greta both need to be able to read Mennonite High German well enough to understand what the Mennonite High German says. Most of the participants, including Neta, said they could read Mennonite High German, but not understand it (as discussed in chapters 4 and 5), but here she positions herself as being able to read, understand, *and* write in Mennonite High German. This positions Neta as having agentive capacity with a high-prestige language, and as such positions her at the centre of the *Dietsch* space.

The fact that Neta talks about texting in Mennonite High German is significant because it is the primary language in which she received formal literacy instruction. Neta attended school in English in Canada for two years, but does not use English to communicate with her mother-in-law because as Rita adds "she [the mother-in-law] doesn't know english" (line 003), which is ratified by Neta in line 004 "she doesn't." The added layer of complexity with the use of Mennonite High German in texting is that during Neta's formal schooling in an Old Colony school in Mexico, she was introduced to reading and writing using *Fraktur*[7] script, as all the school books and resources she would have seen would have been written in this script. *Fraktur* script is in many ways quite unlike Roman script, the font that is used in most smartphones. The script itself serves a distancing function when LGMs like Neta make efforts to use Mennonite High German in another context, like texting.

In this excerpt, Greta clearly positions herself as part of the *Dietsch* space, locating herself close to the centre of the space. This is significant because she is no longer a part of

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[7] *Fraktur* typeface, popularly called "Gotisch" or "gothic" script, is part of a larger group of typefaces called "Blackletter," and was the typeface in which the first Bible was printed (Wiebe, 2013). While it fell out of use in Europe after the Second World War, "for many German-speaking Mennonites, *Fraktur* type was inseparable from the German language" (Wiebe, 2013).

the Old Colony Church, and as a result has little claim to the centre of the *Dietsch* space. But this is why Giampapa's (2004) concept of centre and periphery is so productive—because individuals can contest and claim positions in the immigrant space whether or not the position is open for the taking (cf. chapter 2 and 4). As this is the first focus group discussion, when I had not yet built up relationships with the individual group members, Greta takes on the role of cultural broker for me, too. She does a lot of explaining *for* members of the group, rather than always allowing them to speak for themselves. Interestingly, this doesn't happen as much in the second focus group interview.

While excerpt 1 dealt with texting in Mennonite High German, the language that is already associated with written language, excerpt 2 involves a discussion of texting in the language that is associated with speaking, not writing—Low German, and the creative approaches participants take in communicating in a language that they have no formal literacy training in. Excerpt 2 is the beginning of the texting discussion in the second focus group interview, again brought up in relation to language proficiency, rather than in response to a concrete question about texting. The ways in which the participants position themselves in this excerpt provide additional insight into how the women view themselves in relation to each other and their family members, and addresses the intentional choice-making process they employ when communicating with family and friends. The primary speakers in this excerpt are Justina and Katharina (Justina's sister-in-law).

Excerpt 2: Does everybody text?

```
001   Katha:      like when i text my brothers like they they text me

002               like like in low german back i have to guess
```

```
003            sometimes what it is but i write them back in low

004            german↓

005   Int:     okay yeah i want to actually talk a little bit about

006            texting how many of you text↑ (.) does everybody text↑

007   Aggie:   i do once in a while

008   Katha:   i guess that's where i have my english from↓

009   Int:     ahh okay hahaha ja so what languages do you text in↑

010   Justina: i text low german with my sister because she can't

011            understand english↓

012   Int:     okay

013   Justina: i just don't know how to spell it in low german i

014            spell it in english but she just writing me down what

015            are you writing↑

016   Int:     haha >>((smile voice))yeah it doesn't<< work that well then

017   Justina: she can read my my spelling in low german but she can

018            also read really well well in low german so↓

019   Int:     okay where is your sister↑

020   Justina: in manitoba↓

021   Int:     in manitoba↓ okay
```

Katharina positions herself as being able to text in both Low German ("i write them back in low german" lines 003-004) and English ("i guess that's where i have my english from" line 008). The strategy Katharina employs when texting in Low German is to "guess sometimes" and "write" (line 002-003). The flexibility the texting context provides in terms of what is acceptable language use increases Katharina's agentive capacity to try out different things linguistically in order to communicate, despite her uncertainty ("i have to guess sometimes what it is but i write them back in low german" lines 003-004). This context is also what gives her the agentive capacity to "guess sometimes" and "write" in English as well ("i guess that's where i have my english from" line 008). Katharina is insecure about her English language skills—prior to this excerpt, not included here, she recalls being laughed at by her brothers about her lack of English proficiency. However, she cites texting itself as a mechanism whereby she has learned and built confidence in English (line 008), because, I would argue, there is more flexibility in what is considered acceptable language use than in other written contexts. This underscores the multilingual nature of the language practices related to texting and correlates with Cox's (2013) findings that there is more flexibility in what is considered acceptable language use in languages other than Mennonite High German in the LGM linguascape.

In the same excerpt, Justina makes an explicit connection between English and Low German when it comes to texting. Specifically, like Katharina texting her brothers in Low German, Justina says "i text low german with my sister" (line 010). However, Justina uses English spelling conventions to text her sister in Low German ("i spell it in english" line 013-014) because "i just don't know how to spell it in low german" (line 013). For Justina, it is a struggle to write to her family members in Low German using Low German conventions. At

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the same time, Justina positions herself as a multilingual language user with agentive capacity to make choices to employ conventions from one of the languages in her repertoire to communicate effectively in another language in her repertoire.

Justina's intentional selection of English as a way to bend the sounds of Low German into the shape of English writing conventions, despite her sister's lack of knowledge of English is meaningful for positioning and identity construction in a number of fundamental ways. First, she positions herself as close to the centre of the *Dietsch* space in Canada, because she is able to move between English and Low German successfully and efficiently. She also chooses to talk about this situation in English to me, despite the fact that the floor was opened to Low German contributions at the beginning of the conversation, and a number of the participants talk in Low German throughout the focus group discussion. Through this choice, Justina not only positions herself as proficient in English, but also constructs English as a language that is useful to her in making sense of her experiences as an LGM in Canada.

Second, Justina positions her sister as a creative language user who can decipher Justina's Low German texts even when they are sent using English spelling because this sister can read "really well" in Low German (line 018). Justina's sister is able to figure out the intended meaning most of the time ("she can read my spelling in low german" line 017), but she also asks for clarification, as reported by Justina: "what are you writing?" (line 014-015). Justina has learned how to read and write English, which, through creative efforts such as adopting English texting conventions for Low German sounds, helps her to communicate in Low German with her family. Justina positions herself as not being able to read and write Low German, but positions her sister as being able to do so "really well" (line 018). Since fluency in

Low German is a significant part of what constitutes the centre of *Dietsch* space, this positions Justina's sister at the centre of *Dietsch* space while Justina positions herself as closer to the periphery of the space. As the only child living far away from her family, and her father serving as an area bishop, this is a complicated position for Justina to take up, because of the pressure for church leaders and their families to adhere to all norms (including language) as an example for the rest of the church community.

The discussion around this excerpt demonstrates the tensions inherent in the positioning work of many of the LGM women involved in my study—they must constantly navigate the tensions between the "supposed to" dictated by their church and the norms of their community, while also functioning in the reality of living their lives in a mainstream society that operates under different norms, a society that doesn't even recognize many of the norms by which these women's lives are governed as being factors at all. Texting creates a virtual space where some of the rules governing language use are suspended. At the same time, it is a site where these conflicting norms crash into one another and can bring the conflict and tension *itself* to a head, as can be seen in the discussion of the next excerpt, where the participants talk about texting in mixed code.

Texting in mixed code

In previous excerpts in this chapter, I have discussed creative but monolingual texting practices—first in Mennonite High German, and then in Low German (using English spelling conventions). In this next excerpt, the participants talk about the multilingual practices such as code-switching that they employ when they text, much like their discussion of speaking "Germlish" with their children in chapter 5. They also introduce the idea that different

languages might be associated with different interlocutors, and position themselves as having

the agentive capacity to make choices about what components of which languages to use to

communicate effectively.

Excerpt 3: Choose the language

```
001   Greta:      i text low german with my mo:m and all my sisters (.) and

002               my brothers i text spanish (.) and english

003   All:        haha[haha

004   Int:            [oh (.) why↑

005   Greta:      because because my brothers learned learned spanish befor:e

006               low german because they were (.) MEN they they had to go

007               out to the=

008   ?:          =town

009   Greta:      towns and speak learn to speak spanish and they learned how

010               to read spanish ↓too and we girls didn't [so i

011   Int:                                                 [okay

012   Greta:      taught myself later↑ on↑ i had the ba:sics but i taught

013               myself later on how to read and write spanish (.)

014               ahm but my sisters never did just=one=eva=she knows spanish

015               when she she's the youngest and by that time when

016               cellphones came out she had to learn how to read spanish to

017               figure out phones and texting and all that

018               and cause the brothers were older and they weren't (.) home

019               as much so she had to figure out for my mo:m to use the

020               phone so she still
```

```
021            she can text in spanish low german and english but my other

022            sisters don't

023            so it's whoever i'm talking to i just choose the language

024            and my dad could text spanish too

025   Int:     okay

026   Greta:   but not my mom she can just text low >>((smile voice))

027            german<<

028   All:     hehehe

029   Greta:   so sometimes it will all be mixed like my mom will use one

030            word in spanish that she knows and the rest will be in low

031            german and then eva will have her texts in english mixed

032            with low german and spanish

033            but i understand it all because i (.) figure it out
```

In this excerpt, Greta positions herself as a thoughtful and flexible communicator with significant agentive capacity to select languages intentionally. In this way, she aligns herself with both Katharina and Justina in the previous excerpt in describing her careful linguistic choices when communicating via text with the various members of her family. However, Greta positions herself as being at the centre of the *Dietsch space*, being able to navigate languages and language systems easily, unlike Justina, who positions herself as struggling to render Low German using English conventions. Greta again positions herself as the cultural and linguistic broker, easily navigating between the varied linguistic choices of her family— Low German with her mother and sisters (line 001), and a combination of English and Spanish with her brothers (line 002). The languages between which she selects to text with

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her family members are linked to processes and experiences that are further indicative of diglossic language ideologies among the LGMs connected to the Old Colony Church.

This excerpt also underlines the perceived differences in language use between men and women. Greta's brothers learned Spanish because they were men on the colonies, and needed to be able to read and write Spanish to interact with those outside the colony (line 005-010). They learned to give and receive meaning through written text in Spanish before they were able to do it in their primary language—Low German. The group laughter in line 003 can be interpreted as a comment on the language divide (and subsequent difference in linguistic capital) between men and women.

Greta positions herself as having a lot of agentive capacity because she has linguistic capacity to choose between languages depending on whom she is texting. She positions herself as having more agentive capacity in this regard than her brothers do, because they are not able to text in Low German as effectively as she can to communicate with their mother and sisters. The only other person she positions as having a similar amount of agentive capacity to herself is her sister Eva, who *taught herself* how to text in Low German, Spanish, and English (line 021) because Eva had to facilitate the new technology for their mother. Thus, Greta positions herself and her sister Eva as having the most agentive capacity for efficient communication via text with the rest of the family, because they have the flexibility to choose the language or language combination that is most effective for each family member.

Greta underlines her flexibility and creative language use throughout this excerpt, and all observed conversations and interviews. She talks elsewhere about having taken some

Spanish lessons in the neighbouring village, despite this being against the rules in her community in Mexico, which she says provided her with "the basics,' (line 012). With this foundation, she was able to effectively teach herself how to read and write in Spanish ("so i taught myself later on" line 012), although she does not elaborate on how she does this. She told me that she regularly watches Spanish language *telenovelas* (soap operas) to keep her language up, but that wouldn't teach her reading and writing in the language, which she positions herself as being very comfortable doing. I would argue that for Greta, this creative "figuring out" process is central to the conceptualization of literacy. In this way, Greta not only positions herself as able to confidently choose between languages, but the creative language user positioning is further strengthened by the fact that she is able to interpret all the texts her family sends to her regardless of the language: "i understand it all because i figure it out" (line 033).

Greta further positions her family members as creative language users, because they draw on resources from multiple language systems in order to communicate with one another in writing. While they might not have the same agentive capacity to make choices as freely as she is herself, due to her proficiency in the various languages, Greta specifically refers to her mother using Spanish words in her texts (line 028-030), and describes the process whereby her sister "had to" learn Spanish so she could be the communication conduit for her mother, to teach her how to text to maintain the connections with her children in the far-flung corners of the globe. Interestingly, Mennonite High German, the only language Old Colony children are taught literacy skills in in Mexico does not factor into Greta's discussion of her texting linguascape at all. Unlike Neta, who in excerpt 1 explicitly talks about texting her mother-in-law in Mennonite High German, Greta does not even mention Mennonite

High German in her fairly complicated language choice-making hierarchy. This is significant because it constructs Mennonite High German as less productive for Greta in achieving her communicative goals than Spanish, Low German, and English, which she mentions explicitly.

Excerpt 4 comes from the second focus group discussion, and is a continuation of the lengthy discussion the women have about texting practices. In this focus group discussion, the participants talked a number of times about how their interlocutor was a primary consideration in making linguistic choices. Specifically, they make efforts to accommodate those interlocutors with their language choices—for example, Katharina's brothers who prefer to text in Low German, and Neta's mother-in-law who only texts in Mennonite High German. Katharina and Neta both talked about feeling comfortable trying out different structures or spellings with their husbands in writing, although they both indicated they felt less comfortable doing so with other family members (such as their brothers). Both Katharina and Neta talked about their husbands' encouragement to use written text, whether this was English or Low German, or Spanish, as we will see in the following excerpt. In this next excerpt, Neta describes the multilingual strategies she uses in texting her husband, and his assessment of her attempts.

Excerpt 4: I don't even know any Spanish

```
001   Int:        so (.) when you're texting you don't type↑ (.) you don't
002               type words you say the words into [the
003   Neta:                                         [that's what i do now but
004               before i was typing only to my husband [and he know what i
005               was typing↓
006   Int:                                                [okay
```

```
007   Neta:      but to any other people i i didn't know i thought maybe

008              they will they won't know what i mean and then what i

009              say it doesn't make any sense and so only to my >>((smile

010              voice)) husband<< he he

011   All:       hehe

012   Int:       a secret language haha

013   All:       hehehe

014   Int:       so would [you

015   Neta:             [ja he said it was english and spanish and

016              german even though i didn't even i don't even know

017              >>((smile voice))spanish<<

018   All:       ha ha ha

019   Int:       so someone else told you that this was (.) OH hehe

020   All:       hehe hahaha

021   Eva:       your husband told you right

022   Neta:      ja my husband he told me [i was writing in english and

023              german and

024   Int:                          [oh oh i see

025   Neta:             [spanish i didn't even know any sp-

026              i don't even know any spanish↓

027   Int:                   [oh

028   Greta:                 [and you're like what↑ i don't know

029              any spanish

030   All:       hehehe
```

In line 001, I ask Neta about her texting practices, because I texted with her a number

of times, and she talked excitedly about a new speech-to-text app on her smartphone that

allows her to text others (like me and Julie, the group facilitator, for example) messages in

English. Then in lines 003-005 she explains what her texting practices were like before she got

her speech-to-text program ("before i was typing only to my husband and he know what i was

typing"). Specifically, she intentionally didn't text people other than her husband, who was

able to understand her. In the focus group discussions and interviews, a number of the

women talk about only doing certain kinds of communication (especially texting) with

specific people who don't judge them. In Neta's case, this is her husband, who she thinks

understands her texts, despite the fact that she doesn't feel confident in her writing ability

("they won't know what i mean and then what i say it doesn't make any sense" lines 008-009.)

Through talking about this insecurity, Neta positions herself as insecure about her

ability to use written language resources. However, at the same time, Neta positions herself as

a language expert, since she can use resources from multiple languages to communicate ("i

was writing in english and german" line 020-021). At the same time, Neta is a person who, by

her own admission, has taught herself to read and write Low German completely

independently, so while she often comments on her lack of language and literacy skills, she

also regularly positions herself as a creative language user who can draw on conventions of

languages she does not even speak to communicate with people she cares about, which in

turn demonstrates significant agentive capacity ("i don't even know any spanish" line 016-

017).

Excerpt 4 is an example of contesting available membership categories, in particular those that index proficiency in particular languages (e.g., Spanish), and subsequently, the capital associated with those particular categories. The laughter in lines 010, 012, 016, 018 is a comment on the tensions of "should be" vs. "reality" described above, specifically the idea that there are ways in which language "should be" used, and ways in which individuals actually use it. On the one hand, the laughter comments on the tension between the "supposed to" and the "reality" of language use being mixed—Neta shouldn't be able to text in Spanish because she says that she doesn't know Spanish, but her husband recognizes Spanish language resources in her texting practices. On the other hand, the laughter can also be interpreted as a comment on the daily negotiation of gender norms these women engage in. It is a comment on the in-between space that women must navigate for themselves and for their families. Neta positions herself as simultaneously a language expert and insecure in her language use when it comes to writing, and this tension can be seen as paralleling the tension in this in-between space. The navigation of this in-between space is thus constructed as a shared experience among the participants through common laughter.

Texting as multilingual practice

Excerpt 5 occurs early in the second focus group discussion, and brings together the different themes that were identified as prevalent in relation to texting—the creativity in strategies used for communication, and the multilingual nature of the practice of texting among LGMs. To better understand this excerpt, some context is necessary. Bettie and Nellie are sisters—Bettie is the older sister who is still part of the Old Colony Church, Nellie is the younger sister who is no longer part of the church. In this excerpt, they are talking about an

exchange they had with one another the morning of the focus group discussion. Bettie texted

Nellie in Low German about whether she was going to attend the group that day, Nellie called

Bettie to confirm she had understood the initial text, and then Nellie texted Bettie back.

Excerpt 5: yes ich kaun

```
001   Int:      okay (.) wha what about the rest of you (.) do you [text↑

002   Bettie:                                                      [i

003             was i was texting her this morning i was going to text

004             her and then i thought (.) oh↑ well i'm going to text=

005             i was going to do it in english then i::'m thinking

006             >>((high pitch)) wha↑ what=what=what was that again?<<

007             and then i'm like >>((out breath))OH:<< (.) i'll try

008             it in dietsch

009   All:      hahaha haha

010   Bettie:   and then she answered right but then ah she called ha

011             ha

012   All:      haha[haha

013   Bettie:       [and asked me >>((high pitch)) did i understand

014             that right↑<< [that was supposed to be plautdietsch

015             (.) low german

016   Nellie:                 [well i just had to make SURE right
```

```
017              it was it was GOOD (.) and then i wrote you back yes

018              [ich kaun

018   Bettie:    [oh YES (.) mmYE:S

019   All:       ahahaha [hahaha

020   Bettie:            [yes she KNOWS she can spell in english

021              better

022   Greta:             [>>((smile voice))yes [ich kaun<<

023   Nellie:                                  [yes ich kaun

024   Bettie:    i've got a phone that's supposed to help [me

025   Nellie:                                             [i can't

026              write plautdietsch but i can write a little bit of

027              high german

028   All:       hahahaha haha

029   Nellie:    >>((softly)) i can read high german °pretty good°<<

030   Bettie:    was it high german↑ i thought some of it was low↓ hahaha
```

This excerpt provides a number of different examples of conflicting instances of positioning that occur in the construction of *Dietsch* space, and underline the ways in which texting offers an empowering opportunity for LGMs to assert different aspects of their identities. In this excerpt, Bettie positions Nellie as not fully proficient in Low German, both in terms of what Bettie says about her choice to text her sister in Low German ("i'll try it in dietsch" lines 007-008), how Nellie responded ("she answered right but then she called ha ha"

line 10), and then through her laughter in lines 010-012, 028, and 030. This results in positioning Nellie at the periphery of *Dietsch* space because of the importance of proficiency in Low German to what constitutes the centre of *Dietsch* space.

In positioning Nellie as not sufficiently proficient in Low German, Bettie positions herself as an expert, since she positions herself as qualified to judge her sister's proficiency in the language. The group's orientation to this positioning can be seen by the way in which they join in Bettie's laughter in lines 012, 028, and 030. At the same time, similarly to Neta in excerpt 4, Bettie positions herself simultaneously as a language expert with regard to Low German and uncomfortable with written language ("i've got a phone that's supposed to help me" line 024). This indicates a reliance on technology when it comes to reading and writing.

Like Justina's sister in excerpt 2 in this chapter, Nellie uses the flexibility of being able to call Bettie to ask her whether she has understood the text correctly, but the same strategy positions Nellie and Bettie slightly differently than it does Justina and her sister in Justina's story in excerpt 2. Justina speaks Low German fluently, and identifies it as her primary language, but she uses her English-language spelling resources to write Low German. This results in some confusion for Justina's sister, who can "read low german really really well" (excerpt 2: line 017-018), but "can't understand English" (excerpt 2: lines 010-011). However, in Nellie and Bettie's case, Nellie is no longer a part of the Old Colony Church, and does not use Low German often anymore. The fact that Nellie had to call Bettie to determine whether she had correctly understood her sister's Low German text positions her at the periphery of *Dietsch* space, because she lacks the linguistic flexibility to "figure it out" as creatively as others can. This creative "figuring out" also seems to be a significant component to the

construction of the centre of *Dietsch* space, allowing individuals who are not part of the Old

Colony Church anymore, to take up a central position in the *Dietsch* space.

For her part, Nellie contests being positioned as less proficient in Low German and by

extension, a peripheral positioning within the *Dietsch* space in a number of ways. First, when

Bettie talks about how Nellie had to call her to ask about the text (lins 013-015), Nellie speaks

at the same time, "well I just had to make SURE right" (line 016), and then emphasizes that

she had successfully received her sister's message to her ("it was it was GOOD" line 017), and

demonstrates agentive capacity by texting back to her sister *after* having called her, even

though they could have finished their discussion orally while they were talking on the phone

("and then I wrote you back" line 017).

Second, the return text that Nellie reports sending is a trilingual text—"yes ich kaun"

(lines 017-018)[8]. Nellie uses resources from three different languages—English, Mennonite

High German, and Low German to respond to her sister. This positions her as having the

same multilingual flexibility that has been emphasized as important in all previous excerpts,

the same flexibility that is important to the centre of *Dietsch* space. Third, Nellie positions

herself as being able to write Mennonite High German ("i can't write plautdietsch but i can

write a little bit of high german" lines 025-027). As Cox (2013) noted, Mennonite High German

is a high-prestige language among LGMs, and as I have noted, most of my participants talk

about being able to recognize words or copy Mennonite High German, but have difficulty

using Mennonite High German to produce new or original text (cf. chapter 4). In this excerpt,

Nellie, who is positioned by her sister and the laughter of the others in the group as

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[8] The pronunciation of the word "ich" is clearly a High German pronunciation, rather than a Low German pronunciation, which is why I would argue that the text was trilingual.

peripheral in the *Dietsch* space, claims a more central position for herself by invoking

proficiency in Mennonite High German in lines 025-027 and again in line 029: "i can read

high german pretty good."

While Nellie contests a peripheral position within *Dietsch* space, the group laughter in

this excerpt makes it difficult for her. The group laughter in line 009 can be interpreted as a

comment on multilingual language use and the creativity "trying it" in *Dietsch* requires. The

laughter in line 009 also characterizes this "trying it" as a shared experience. I argue that the

laughter in line 012 and in line 019 comments on the multilingual language use, while

simultaneous commenting of the positioning of Nellie at the periphery of Dietsch space.

Specifically, participants are laughing about the tension inherent in the multilingual use, that

monolingual communication is the preferred ("supposed to") norm, while their reality is

multilingual and therefore messy—in texting as much as in oral communication (cf. chapter 5

on multilingual language use and language attitudes).

The ways in which members of the LGM community talk about texting demonstrate

that it serves a similar function to letter writing, which was identified by Hedges (1996) as a

vital group-constituting literacy practice. However, given the formal conventions of writing a

letter, and the fact that letter writing is seen as a practice that must be conducted in

Mennonite High German, there is a disconnect between what individual people might want

to express (much of which occurs in Low German, but is really a multilingual mix, including

code-switching into and out of Low German, Mennonite High German, Spanish and English),

and what they can feasibly render in written form. Writing and reading on the colonies is

always a translation process, because individuals do not write their primary language, the

language in which their lives and thoughts and dreams unfold. Texting then provides a

unique platform where the reality of what is going on in their everyday language practices can

be rendered without being mediated through a distancing translation process.

The positioning of LGMs as creative and resourceful language users is, as has been

shown, often conflicting, because although participants position themselves as "having taught

themselves" enough linguistic resources to read and write, whether Low German or English

or Spanish, all participants comment on their insecurities about those language systems, such

as their lack of knowledge of spelling, and even their insecurities with written text of any

kind. At the same time, participants position themselves strongly as part of an oral culture,

and thereby comment on the inherent flexibility they have because they are *not* bound to one

system of orthography and grammar.

They are "open-minded", rather than "written text" people (excerpt 1), so they can be

creative about figuring out what people text them. Another feature of this positioning as part

of an oral culture is the repeated orientation toward sound, talking about how the languages

sound, and coming up with creative strategies for how to capture those sounds in written

text. Their experience as members of a culture that move between and through a variety of

languages on a daily basis allows for resourcefulness in developing communication strategies

in texting that are more similar to oral strategies, specifically using resources from multiple

language systems, and calling when there is a complete breakdown of communication.

Texting is an empowering multilingual and "translanguaging" (Li, 2011) practice for

LGMs, perhaps precisely because it is not considered a formal literacy practice by the

community. It allows them to write in Low German, which other written media (e.g. letters)

do not readily allow them to do, and to practice and experiment with English, in a way that at least one participant says has allowed her to learn it. Thus, texting as a practice serves to construct their multilingual *Dietsch* space which connects them to the broader "imagined village" regardless of geographic location.

Literacy practices such as texting can be seen as transforming the way in which LGMs engage with literacy in some ways. The literacy practices that are necessary for participation in colony life, such as memorization of the catechism and passages of the Bible for the purpose of baptism and membership are not as useful for everyday life when the community is decentralized as it is outside of Mexico. While those practices are group constituting in Mexico, new processes of membership construction are necessary for a more multilingual, technologically saturated, and geographically separated reality. The multilingual practices outlined in this chapter are much more reflective of the experienced reality of the LGM population in Canada.

Chapter 8 Conclusions and Further Directions

Daut es je soo, daut doa fael feschiedne Sproake sent enn dise Welt, en nich eena es oone Raed. 1 Korinta 14:10

Es gibt auf der Welt unzählige Sprachen, und alle haben ihren Sinn. 1 Korinter 14:10

There are doubtless many languages in the world, and none is without meaning. 1 Corinthians 14: 10

The story of Babel, which is a story of people being divided by language and driven to the four corners of the earth, is an Old Testament story. When LGMs first began migrating (back) to Canada in the 1950s, the Old Colony Church leaders emphasized the division, both geographic and linguistic, in an effort to maintain the *oole Ordnunk* that structured the lives of *Dietsche* people on the colonies in Mexico. This division and movement away from the way things had been was initially felt to be a punishment, much like in the story of Babel. However, although we don't hear about it explicitly in the story of Babel, the people of the world in the Bible story adapted to their new context and their new languages, and developed ways of communicating through and beyond the languages that God gave them. In the same way, LGMs adapted to their new context in Canada, finding new ways of being and speaking *Dietsch*, even when they were no longer living in the villages and colonies that organized the borders of their lives in Mexico.

The New Testament has a different take on language than the story of Babel, which is reflective of the language use of the LGM participants in my study. The passage from 1 Corinthians states that all languages have value and meaning, and this is in keeping with how LGM participants talked about their language use. The German word at the end of the

passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, *Sinn* (sense; meaning), is the same as the English word "meaning." The Low German word at the end of this passage is *Raed*, which can be translated as "speaking" or "speech." This translation connecting meaning and speaking points to the same connection between sound and meaning that the participants in my study spoke of as part of how they construct the role of language in the *Dietsch* space.

There is a perception of what "should be" done linguistically, and a demonstrated understanding of an ideology that requires a clear separation of the different languages in their linguascape. Furthermore, there seems to be a clearly perceived hierarchy for the languages with which they come into contact—Low German, Mennonite High German, English, Spanish. However, together, LGMs construct a *Dietsch* space that does not categorize practices into the clearly defined realms of "sinndeosche" (Sunday-like) and "auldeosche" (everyday) that structure the ideology of language practices on the colonies in Mexico. The participants in my study contest the centrality of Mennonite High German in this *Dietsch* space, and rather construct a space in which proficiency in Low German is central, and where speaking and texting "Germlish," and other multilingual practices are acceptable and important in developing agency within the *Dietsch* space.

Language is central to the way LGMs position themselves in both the *Dietsch* and Canadian spaces. Since they refer to themselves as *Dietsch*, LGMs are always talking about themselves in relation to their language. When they migrate from Mexico to Canada, from villages and colonies to more isolated contexts, there is a major shift in how they can position themselves in relation to other LGMs and in relation to other Canadians they come into contact with in contexts such as public schools. Specifically, LGM women navigate an in-

between space—in Mexico they usually do not learn Spanish because they are not intended to interact with people who are not *Dietsch*. In Mexico, they speak Low German at home and in the village streets, and learn to recognize Mennonite High German letters and produce sounds that are associated with them.

In Canada, LGM women and their children tend to be the people who interact with non-*Dietsch* people—at school, at the doctor's office, at the grocery store. In those places, the dominant language is English, and especially the children learn it quickly. English becomes the primary language for many LGM children, especially those who were born here in Canada. The mothers in my study positioned themselves as language teachers, and reported feeling responsible for teaching their children Low German so that they could participate in the *Dietsch* space in Canada. *Dietsch* is the language that connects them to their families, to their heritage, and in many ways, to their faith, which is why it has such a central position in the *Dietsch* space. Contesting a monolingual or diglossic ideology, the mixed code ("Germlish") that the mothers speak with their children also has a central position in the *Dietsch* space.

This "mixed-up" multilingual reality is central to the construction of *Dietsch* space in Canada. The stories the women tell about their language learning experiences, their children's language learning experiences, and how they all talk about texting one another, are indicative of these multilingual practices being constitutive of *Dietsch* space. Through these multilingual practices—speaking and listening, writing and reading—they are constantly negotiating their positioning in relation to their languages, and to each other.

One of my aims in conducting the research in the first place was to provide some useful insight that would enhance the work being done with LGMs by organizations such as Mennonite Central Committee Ontario (MCCO) and others. In my experience, there is a lot of excellent, culturally sensitive work being done with LGMs in Ontario already, by social workers, teachers, health care providers, and others. At the same time, I believe this project can contribute to the work being done by adding some more nuanced understanding to what people already know and are already doing, since, as Good Gingrich (2016) has found, not all service providers working with LGMs have the same orientation towards cultural sensitivity. Specifically, in her work, Good Gingrich found that many well-meaning service providers saw success in working with LGMs when the LGMs changed attitudes and behaviours to be more mainstream Canadian. This approach takes as its premise the idea that LGMs are somehow deficient and need to be "fixed," and approach that is problematic and ultimately unproductive for both LGMs and service providers.

I do not mean to imply that there aren't problems among LGMs in Canada—there are abusive relationships, in homes and in churches, there are substance abuse problems, there is extreme poverty and isolation. It can be argued that many of these problems are related to lack of education and the Old Colony Church's resistance to change, which results in patriarchal structures that are advantageous to a few at the expense of many others. However, I would argue that these same kinds of problems exist among all groups of people, and while these problems are heart-breaking and difficult to solve, they do not represent the sum total or even a majority of what a particular group experiences.

Based on my findings, I would suggest that a more productive approach would be to adjust the premise, viewing LGM individuals as whole people with "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff, Gonzalez, 1992) in terms of language, behaviour, and culture that allow them to participate fully in the spaces they construct. It is important that these funds of knowledge are viewed and accepted as legitimate and meaningful, even if the linguistic and cultural values they contain are different (or even antithetical) to other social and cultural funds of knowledge that might be more familiar to a service provider, teacher, or administrator. When the premise of service delivery shifts in this way, it is possible to find a starting point of mutual respect. Subsequently, it is then possible to view LGMs (or a member of any marginalized community) as individuals with agentive capacity to *collaborate with* service providers, rather than individuals who have processes and procedures *done to* them.

My research demonstrates that LGMs are already doing this complicated work of positioning themselves in relation to dominant Canadian norms, but also that they are not simply stuck in an archaic religious worldview that must be changed to conform to these dominant discourses. Instead, there too, the women in my study demonstrate that they are actively engaged in adaptation and change, contesting many of these dominant discourses as having the same relevance in their own experiences, even as they work to contest yet other discourses that dominate the LGM context about church, home, and family.

As the title of this dissertation suggests, the women in my study contest what constitutes the centre of *Dietsch* space, and they do this in countless ways. They do this through laughter which comments on tensions when they co-tell stories of language learning and language use. They do this through using a mixed code with their children, even while

they work to teach their children fluent Low German. They also do this by including people in their group who are no longer part of the Old Colony Church, expanding what it means to be *Dietsch*.

 Dietsch space is a productive concept, because it allows for individuals who are no longer part of the Old Colony Church to position themselves as connected to other LGMs and to foreground *Dietsch* aspects of their identities. Most of the previous work on LGMs has used belonging to the Old Colony Church as an organizing principle for drawing boundaries on participants. In my fieldwork and through a number of initiatives I have been involved with, such as the *Still/Moving: Stories of Low German-speaking Mennonite Women* conference held at King's College, in London, Ontario in August 2016, I have gotten to know many individuals who are no longer a part of the Old Colony Church, but who consider themselves *Dietsch*. Their voices and experiences are often bracketed out in research about LGMs. It has struck me that moving forward, it would be productive to build on the findings in this project by applying the same framework specifically to people who have left the Old Colony Church. The way they negotiate language use and heritage, culture and faith is also part of the construction of *Dietsch* space in Canada. I see this as an important next step in developing a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes the centre and periphery of *Dietsch* space.

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Appendix A: Transcription Conventions

The descriptions of transcription conventions have been adapted from the University of Leicester's website:

http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/psychology/research/child-mental-health/cara-1/faqs/jefferson

(.)   A full stop inside brackets denotes a micro pause, a notable pause but of no significant length.

(0.2)   A number inside brackets denotes a timed pause. This is a pause long enough to time and subsequently show in transcription.

[Square brackets denote a point where overlapping speech occurs.

> <   Arrows surrounding talk like these show that the pace of the speech has quickened

< >   Arrows in this direction show that the pace of the speech has slowed down

( )   Where there is space between brackets denotes that the words spoken here were too unclear to transcribe

(( ))   Where double brackets appear with a description inserted denotes some contextual information where no symbol of representation was available.

Under When a word or part of a word is underlines it denotes a raise in volume or emphasis

↑   When an upward arrow appears it means there is a rise in intonation

↓   When a downward arrow appears it means there is a drop in intonation

→   An arrow like this denotes a particular sentence of interest to the analyst

CAPITALS Where capital letters appear it denotes that something was said loudly or even shouted

Hum(h)our When a bracketed 'h' appears it means that there was laughter within the talk

=   The equal sign represents latched speech, a continuation of talk

::   Colons appear to represent elongated speech, a stretched sound

Appendix B: Ethics Documentation

Recruitment Email

Dear **(Name)**:

My name is Christine Kampen Robinson and I am a graduate student in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am interested in the connection between language and society, and in particular in how people connected to the Old Colony Church use their different languages, how they have come to learn them and how their move to Canada and possibly other countries affects this. In order to research this topic, I would like to have discussions with a number of different individuals connected to the Old Colony community, first in a group with other participants, and individually with me or my research assistant at a later date.

As you work closely with the Old Colony community, I would like to ask for your help in finding people who might be interested in talking to me. Participants will receive a small amount of remuneration for their participation (grocery gift cards). However, I believe that the results of the research will be beneficial to the community in other ways. My aim is that the results of my research are ultimately helpful to organizations who work to provide programming for Low German-speaking Mennonites in Canada, especially related to literacy and language instruction, and I plan on sharing the results of my research with yours and other related organizations once it is complete.

If you have any questions about the project, you may request a meeting with me by phoning me at my home number (519)745-0570, emailing me at ckampenr@uwaterloo.ca or writing me a letter at c/o University of Waterloo, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, 200 University Ave W, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1.

You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Grit Liebscher, at (519) 888-4567 ext. 35695 or by email at gliebsch@uwaterloo.ca. You may do so also if you have additional questions at a later date. This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Christine Kampen Robinson

PhD Candidate

University of Waterloo

Information Script:

Who am I?

I would like to introduce myself and my study about languages and language use of individuals of Mennonite background. First of all, thank you so much for your interest. My name is Christine Kampen Robinson, and I am a graduate student in the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies at the University of Waterloo. I am interested in the connection between language and society, and in particular in how people use their different languages, how they have come to learn them and how your move to Canada and possibly other countries affects this. In order to research this topic, I would like to have discussions with you, first in a group with other participants, and individually with me or my research assistant at a later date.

Research logistics:

Because I would like to use these discussions for research purposes, I would like to audio or video record them, whichever you prefer. I am particularly interested in how you use the different languages you speak, and therefore need to make a very detailed record of how you do so, which is why I would like to audio or video record our conversations. I would like to archive these recordings, which would mean that I would keep them in a locked cabinet in my home or a password-protected computer. The only people who would have access to these would be me, my supervisor, Dr. Grit Liebscher, and students working on the project as research assistants now and in the future.

If you would like to participate in this study, I would first have a focus group discussion, which will consist of me and/or my research assistant who speaks Low German, other participants of the study, and, if you wish, one or two other community members you would know. These group discussions will last approximately two hours each. You could then decide if you would like to participate in an individual conversation with me and possibly the Low German speaking student researcher/translator, and a community member, if you would like. Individual interviews will last approximately one hour. In the group discussion and the individual conversation, we would ask you questions about your language and experiences with your moves but you may leave questions unanswered.

Anonymity:

Your participation in this project is voluntary, and the recordings will only be used for research purposes. I and my research assistant(s) plan to then present and/or publish the results of this study at conferences and in linguistic journals and books. The identity of the participants will be kept anonymous in all publications and presentations, which means that I will use a pseudonym (alternate name) for your name and change any other information in the transcripts that others might use to identify you. The audio recordings or videos themselves will never be shown in public. Only the researchers, including student researchers assisting me, will have access to them.

Participation:

If you are interested, I would ask that you give your consent orally once the tape is running, by saying: "My name is X, and I have understood the information Christine has given me. I give Christine permission to record me." You can listen to these recordings at any time if you would like, and get a copy of the recording. You may also choose to withdraw your participation at any time if you decide not to participate in the study anymore. If you make that decision, that would mean that your recordings would not be used in the study and they would not be archived. Instead, they would be erased/shredded. If you decide to participate you will receive a gift card in the amount of $10. The amount received is taxable. It is your responsibility to report this amount for income tax purposes.If you are interested, I would also like to ask you to consider recording some every day conversations at home, to see how you use language at home with your family. I will give you a digital recording device and you can record your family have ordinary conversations, such as at the dinner table or while you are doing dishes or playing a game. People who will be heard on the recording must give their oral consent at the beginning of the tape, just like you did during the focus group and individual interviews. You can give this permission in Low German, English, Spanish or Mennonite High German, whatever language you prefer.

Last word:

I would be happy to share the results of our study with you at the end of the project. We could send you a copy of the publications, or possibly discuss the results with you directly. I will also plan to organize an event to present some of my results to participants and other members of the community who may be interested. I am hoping to share the results with MCC Ontario and other organizations that work with Low German-speaking Mennonites to help improve programming, especially in the areas of education and language policy. You may request the results and/or a meeting with me by phoning me at my home number (519)745-0570, emailing me at ckampenr@uwaterloo.ca or writing me a letter at c/o University of Waterloo, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, 200 University Ave W, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1.

If you have any questions about participation in this project, please feel free to contact me at the contact information above, or my supervisor, Dr. Grit Liebscher, at (519) 888-4567 ext. 35695 or by email at gliebsch@uwaterloo.ca. You may do so also if you have additional questions at a later date. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. In the event you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin at at (519) 888-4567, ext. 36005, or by e-mail at maureen@nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

Feedback Letter/ Script

Dear (*Name*);

I am writing to thank you for your time and insightful information about your life history, language use, and other questions you discussed with me and/or my research assistant. The outcome from this conversation and your answers will help me very much in my research on languages and language use of individuals of Mennonite background.

My project is proceeding well, and I will write up the results in the near future. I am now seeing a few more individuals such as yourself who can lend additional information and insights. Thank you for suggesting (**name of contact**) as a potential source.

I hope you will get in touch with me if further thoughts occur to you about the subject of the conversation with me or my research assistant. This project has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee. Should you have any comments or concerns you could also contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin of our Office of Research Ethics at 519-888-4567 Ext. 36005 or maureen@nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.If you would like a copy of a publication resulting from the study in the future, or possibly discuss the results with me directly, please don't hesitate to phone me at my home number (519) 745-0570, by e-mailing either me ckampenr@uwaterloo.ca, or writing me a letter c/o University of Waterloo, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, 200 University Ave W, Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1 . You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Grit Liebscher, at (519) 888-4567 ext. 35695 or by email at gliebsch@uwaterloo.ca.

Thanks yet again for your participation in this project!

<div align="right">

Sincerely,

Christine Kampen Robinson

PhD Candidate

University of Waterloo

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Appendix C: Questions for Group and Individual Discussions

(These questions form the basis for the focus groups as well as the individual discussions. The order is subject to change.)

- o What languages do you speak?
- o What languages are you aware of that are spoken in the area?
- o Where did you learn the languages you speak?
- o How well do you think you know those languages?
  - o Writing
  - o Reading
  - o Speaking
- o When and with whom do you use them?
  - o What language do you speak at home (in your house)?
  - o What language do you speak at church?
  - o What language did you speak in school?
    - ▪ What was school like for you?
  - o What language do speak at the grocery store? At cooking group? etc.
  - o What languages do your children speak? How do you feel about that?
    - ▪ Do you teach your children Plautdietsch? How do you do that?/ Why not?
- o Literacy:
  - o What kinds of things you read (ie., newspaper, Bible, letters, etc.)? What language are those texts?
  - o What kinds of things do you write (ie., letters, recipes, text messages, etc.)? What language are those texts?
  - o How important is reading/ writing in Mexico? In Canada?
- o Which language do you prefer and why?
- o What limitations have you experienced due to your language preferences?
- o How important is Plautdietsch in your life? Has the importance of Plautdietsch in your life changed? Was it less or more important before, for example, when you were a child?
- o How important is English in your life?
- o How important is Spanish in your life?
- o To what extent has your move to Canada and other countries had an impact on your language use? Can you tell us about your contacts with other countries?
  - o Experiences in Mexico
  - o Experiences in other countries
- o Would you say that your views on language are the same or different from other members of your family? Of your community? How are they the same or different?