THE LANGUAGE OF THE WEST SIBERIAN MENNONITES
by
R. Nieuweboer and T. de Graaf

Plautdiitsch, the language used by Mennonites in many parts of the world, is a descendant of West Prussian Low German dialects. Many of its peculiarities can be explained by the two centuries of isolation from other German dialects and by contacts with other languages. Until recently, the dialect of West Siberia could be studied by Soviet scholars only, but in the last few years it has become possible also for others to do ethno-linguistic field work in this area. The Universities of Oldenburg, Novosibirsk and Groningen study this particular variety of the Plautdiitsch language in a joint research project.

1. Introduction

In the newly formed German National Region in Southwestern Siberia, near the border with Kazakhstan, many of the small villages scattered around the steppe have German sounding names: Gnadenheim, Schönsee, Rosenwald, Blumenort. Here you can find people with names like Henritj, Klaus, Mariitje and surnames like Friizen, Koop, Klaassen or Ditj. This is an area populated mainly by Mennonites. When we visited this region in the summer of 1993, on the first day of our stay one of the villagers greeted us with the words: 'Gndaach, wii zene uk fon Holaunt' — 'Hello, we are from Holland, too'. The Mennonites living in this part of Russia have been quite isolated from the other Mennonites in the country since the beginning of the century, and in Soviet times it has been very difficult for them to find any reliable information about the history of their own group. They know their greatgrandparents came from the Ukraine, but there certainty ends. Most people do know, however, that their history is linked with Germany, Holland and Friesland. Most Mennonites in the former Soviet Union are officially considered to be Germans (*citizenship* and *nationality* being two different points mentioned in the passport), but a minority state to be Dutch. Others again consider 'Mennonite' to be not an ethno-religious factor but a nationality. In a few cases people told us they were Frisians. The language they speak, Mennonite Plautdiitsch,

is the descendant of Low German dialects differing considerably from the High German dialects spoken by their neighbours, often people who have been deported from the Wolga German Republic. Because of the lack of mutual intelligibility of the dialects, Mennonites were never considered to be 'real Germans' by the (other) Germans but were always treated as a rather special group, and this is also the way they view themselves. The Soviet authorities considered the Mennonites to be just as German as the other almost two million of so-called 'ethnic Germans' in the country and didn't wish to accept their historical and other differences. At the beginning of World War II, the Germans living in the European parts of the Soviet Union not occupied by the Nazis were deported to Siberia; the West-Siberian Mennonites over the age of 15 were taken to labour camps where many of them died from starvation and exhaustion. After the war the ethnic Germans of the Soviet Union were still labelled traitors and enemies of the Soviet people, and until 1955 they did not have the same civil rights as other Soviet citizens. Unofficially, this situation continued well into the eighties. This meant that the deported Germans were not allowed to return to their homes, seldom had access to higher education and were generally subject to discriminatory treatment by the local authorities. At the beginning of the war the Mennonites tried to prove they were of Dutch, rather than of German descent, but this 'Holländerei' was ridiculed and for most Mennonites, labour camps and deportation were inevitable. Only those among them who already lived in Siberia could return to their homes a few years after the war. Their freedom of movement, however, was very limited until 1955: they were not allowed to even visit relatives in the next village without written consent from the local authorities. No less threatening was the hostile attitude of the surrounding Russians, who had been made to believe that all Germans, including the Mennonites, were collaborators and fascists. Until quite recently, it was hazardous to speak German in public outside the German villages. This, of course, is another reason why the Mennonites often underlined their non-German extraction. The Plautdiitsch language was often used to prove this. Some Mennonites said their language was a Dutch, rather than a German dialect, others stated it was Frisian. Linguists had long ago demonstrated that Plautdiitsch is a mixture of Low German dialects of the West Prussian branch with a few peculiarities due mainly to the long isolation from other German dialects and the many contacts with

Slavonic speaking communities, but this was not taken into consideration in the ensuing discussion. Since Mennonite history started in the Netherlands and many of the first Mennonites came from areas in the North and East of this country, it must be possible, so it was thought, to find linguistic ties with the Netherlands proving the Dutch character of the language. Some Dutch joined these efforts, writing about 'Dutch in the Russian steppe' or using words to the same effect. A short summary of Mennonite history might be appropriate here.

2. Historical background

At the beginning of the 16th century, growing discontent with the Catholic church led to the foundation of a number of new religious movements. The most well-known of the reformers are Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli; in the same period Menno Simons from the small village of Wytmarsum in Friesland gathered a number of people around him, many of whom were fugitives from more southern parts of the Netherlands, but also from Germany and Switzerland. During the following years, Menno Simons and his disciples first found refuge in the town of Groningen, then had to move eastwards to Eastern Friesland. From there, many of the Mennonites, as they were later referred to, moved on to Western Prussia, into the Weichsel delta area. In the late Middle Ages, many people from the western parts of Germany, but also from the Netherlands, had settled here, being the first non-Slavonic colonists (Mitzka 1968). Danzig being a Hanseatic town, it had many contacts with the Netherlands (Dutch was a language used there until the end of the 18th century), and moving to this area must have seemed a logical decision. The Mennonites, who preferred living in seclusion from the outside world, earning their living as farmers, found an environment that reminded them very much of the northern parts of the Netherlands and Germany they had just left (Gerlach 1992; Penner 1984; Unruh 1955).

The settlers were not a homogeneous group, they spoke different languages and dialects: Frisian, Low Franconian and Low Saxon dialects. In their new country, they settled among people who spoke various Low German dialects, which must have sounded rather familiar to them. Dutch was to be preserved as the language used in

church for over two centuries, and religious literature for the Mennonites was printed in the Netherlands, but for everyday communication the dialects of the area were soon adapted.

The Polish state did not interfere much with the lives of the emigrants, and until the first Polish Partition (1772) the Mennonites were allowed to live according to their principles. When, as a result of this Partition, the area around Danzig became a part of the state of Prussia, the situation deteriorated significantly. Their refusal to bear arms brought the Mennonites into serious conflict with the authorities, and once again emigration seemed the only alternative. In 1789, a first group of settlers set off for Southern Russia, to areas later to become part of the Ukraine. They were invited by Catherine the Great, who needed farmers for the parts of Southern Russia recently conquered from the Ottoman empire. After the second Partition of Poland (1793), the remaining parts of the Danzig area were incorporated into the Prussian State. In 1803-4 a second group of Mennonites left the Weichsel area for Southern Russia. The first group of settlers were mainly rather poor farmers, who did not have the financial means to support professional preachers. For the first years they had lay preachers, who used Plautdiitsch dialects in church. The colony they founded was called Chortitsa or the Old Colony, the second group founded the Molochna or New Colony. These later emigrants were better off than the first ones, and they brought trained preachers who had sufficient knowledge of High German to preach in this language (the Dutch Bible had been replaced by the High German Bible translation of Luther not long before this). The second group also had had more contact with High German during the last ten or so years of their stay in Prussia, since that language was then imposed as the official language. Furthermore, the two groups of settlers came from different parts of the Weichsel delta area, which means they spoke somewhat different dialects. The two dialects evolving in the new environment, both being mixtures of Western Prussian speech varieties, reflected the differences in geographical, social and historical background of these two groups. In Mennonite colonies all over the world, the differences between the Chortitsa and Molochna dialects still survive, due mainly to the existence of two major religious groups: the more conservative Flemish branch and the more liberal Frisian branch, a division dating back to 1568.

Although the emigrants were not allowed to settle in the Crimea pensinsula as promised originally, the soil in the region they

colonized was fertile enough for the Mennonite communities to develop relatively well. Soon, daughter colonies were founded, first in the areas closest to the Chortitsa and Molochna colonies, later also in other parts of South East Russia.

A major setback for the Mennonites was the abolition of their privileges in the 1870's, which resulted in a large emigration to Canada and the United States (Thiessen 1963, 1977). The founding of new colonies continued, however, and after 1910, at the height of Stolypin's reforms, a group of settlers left for Siberia in search of fertile land. They founded colonies in the Orenburg region, the Kulunda Steppe near the border with Kazakhstan and as far as the Amur region. After the Russian revolution of 1917 a second emigration started, which soon came to an end when the authorities closed the borders of the new Soviet Union hermetically. In the late 1920's, a group of Mennonites were lucky enough to be allowed to emigrate from the Soviet Union, where the situation was getting more and more troublesome. Many more, however, who had sold everything they owned and were waiting for emigration approval in tent camps near Moscow, were taken back to their villages where most of them perished since they no longer had any means of subsistence or even a place to live.

The colonies in Canada and the United States soon prospered at this time, and new areas were settled. As a result of the outbreak of World War I, however, the Canadian authorities prohibited the use of German at school. Many of the more orthodox Mennonites left and founded new colonies in Mexico, from where some moved on to Honduras, Paraguay, Uruguay and the Argentine. Most of these South American colonies never reached the same prosperity as those in Northern America (Brandt 1991).

In the Soviet Union, after the emigration of the 1920's had ended so abruptly, mass deportation of Mennonites started in the 1930's. When World War II started, all ethnic Germans in the Soviet Union faced labour camps and deportation. When the German armies retreated, most Soviet Germans from the occupied parts of the country followed them, either because they were forced, or because they feared retaliation by the Soviet government. The Allies, failing to understand the situation in the USSR, repatriated most Soviet Germans after the war, allowing only a small number to emigrate to other countries. Some Mennonites managed to join family in North America, but most were refused entry into Canada and the United

States and eventually they found refuge in Paraguay, Urugay, Argentina and Brazil. Here they now live in colonies founded mostly by immigrants from Canada who settled in South America a few decades earlier.

In the Soviet Union, the situation improved somewhat after Stalin's death in 1953, but it lasted many years before emigration again became a possible alternative. The colonies in the Ukraine had disappeared, and most Mennonites now lived in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Only in a few areas in South-Western Siberia Mennonites still lived in ethnically homogenous villages, in most other parts of the country they were scattered amongst many other nationalities. When Gorbachov's reforms opened the country's borders and West Germany's liberal immigration policy for ethnic Germans made it possible for the Mennonites to leave Russia, mass emigration started. Since 1986-87 over 50% of the Mennonites living in the former Soviet Union have emigrated. In the villages in the Altai Region we visited in the summer of 1993, only a few years ago almost 100% of the population were Mennonites, but now in some villages they are a minority. The newcomers are mainly Russians and russified Germans – including a few Mennonites – who flee the troubled Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan and Kirgisia (now Kirgizstan).

3. The Plautdiitsch language

Now let us return to the Plautdiitsch language. The language as it is used today in Mennonite communities all over the world is the descendant of West Prussian varieties of Low German. The two century isolation in a non-German speaking environment has resulted not only in a considerable number of loanwords from the surrounding languages, but also in a somewhat different and partly accelerated development of a few elements already present in the Weichsel delta dialects. The resemblances between Plautdiitsch and Dutch, or rather the Low Saxon dialects of the Dutch language, sometimes taken as 'evidence' of the non-German origin of Plautdiitsch, are often exaggerated: 'Thousands of people in Siberia speak the Groningen dialect' one Dutch newspaper stated in 1991. In reality, many of the existing resemblances show the close relations between Low German dialects in general, not between Plautdiitsch

and the Low Saxon dialects spoken in the Netherlands in particular. In some cases, we should not call these phenomena common developments but rather the absence of sound changes that have taken place in High German. It is often heard from people from the areas of Groningen and Drenthe that they can speak their own dialect in all of Northern Germany and be understood; it is true, certainly, that for a long time there was a dialect continuum reaching from the northern parts of the Netherlands to Prussia. Still, the dialects at both ends of this chain differed considerably, and communication between people speaking such different dialects is possible only in a situation where contacts are frequent. In the Middle Ages, this surely was the case, but nowadays a dialect speaker from the North of Germany visiting the adjacent parts of the Netherlands would find the local dialect highly influenced by the standard language (Niebaum 1992). Nevertheless, for Dutchmen it is astonishing to find a Low German dialect spoken as far away as in Siberia and actually to be able to understand a great many words. Below, we will take a more structural look at the elements from which Western Siberian Plautdiitsch is composed.

As already mentioned, in most Mennonite communities two different varieties of the language are used, the Old Colony or Chortitsa dialect, and the New Colony or Molochna variety. The dialect of the Altai Region seems to be one of the rare examples of a mixture of these two varieties. The question how the (religious) distinctions between the two groups could be overcome has yet to be answered, but most people in this area do not know exactly to which of them their ancestors belonged or from which part of Southern Russia or the Ukraine they came. The following list shows some of the most typical differences between the dialects of Chortitsa and Molochna, and the forms used in the Altai Region (Jedig 1966, 1970; Quiring 1928).

Chortitsa	Molochna	Altai	
[kʼɪkʼən]	[tʼɪtʼə]	[tʼɪtʼə]	*to look*
[lɪgʼən]	[lɪdʼə]	[lɪdʼə]	*to lie*
[hyːs]	[huːs]	[hyːs]	*house*
[byːən]	[buːə]	[byːə]	*to build*

[kuːlən]	[koːlə]	[koːlə, kuːlə]	*coal*
[møɔkən]	[mɔɐkə]	[moɐkə]	*make, do*
[zeɪt]	[zeɪt, zəɪt]	[zəɪt, zɔɪt]	*sweet*
[plaut]	[plɔːt]	[plɔːt]	*flat*
[jiː]	[zeɪ, zəɪ]	[zəɪ, zɔɪ, jiː]	*you (polite form)*

The consonant systems seems to be practically identical, with the exception of the development of the palatalized phonemes originating from /k, g/ before or after front vowels: the Chortitsa dialect has [k', g'], the Molochna dialect has [t', d']. The main differences are found in the vowel systems: most long vowels and diphthongs have separate realizations in the two varieties. Within the Altai dialect, great variation in the vowel system is possible, so that the actual pronunciation of a word may differ from speaker to speaker and from occasion to occasion.

Two of the differences bear resemblance to those found in Dutch dialects: standard [œy] as in *huis* (*house*) corresponds to [u] (the older form) in some varieties of Low Saxon, and [y] (a later development) in others; the infinitive endings [(ə)n] and [ə] are found in the Low Saxon and the Low Franconian dialects respectively.

As we have seen in the above, Plautdiitsch has a striking peculiarity: a number of palatalized consonant phonemes. In a few dialects in or near the Weichsel delta area, /k/ in front of or following a palatal vowel was realized as [k'], [t'] or [tʃ], and in Plautdiitsch this development later continued, resulting in the three new phonemes /k'/ or /t'/, /g'/ or /d'/, and /n'/. In West Siberian Plautdiitsch, original /k/ has become /t'/ in the following positions:

1. in front of (originally) palatal vowels:
   [t'oɐʃ] compare High German *Kirsche*; [t'aːrps] *Kürbis*
2. in front of (originally) palatal vowels, before [l,n,r,v]:
   [t'ləɪdʌ] *Kleider*; [t'liːn] *klein*; [t'nɛpəl] *Knüppel*; [t'naːls] *Cornelius*; [t'rɪç] *Krieg*; [t'rɪpst] *kriechst* (from the infinitive [kryːpə] *kriechen*); [t'viːlə] *quälen*
3. after (originally) palatal vowels:
   [t'eʌt'] *Küche*; [ɛt'] *ich*
4. after (originally) palatal vowels + /l,n,r/:
   [maːlt'] *Milch*; [drɪn't'] *trink*; [boʌt'] *Birke*

In the first two positions original /g/ has changed to /j/:

1. [jeːjənt] *Gegend*
2. [jlɛt'] *Glück*; [jnɛt'] *Genick*; [jriːpə] *greifen*

Geminated /gg/ in some positions has changed to /d'/:

[brɪd'] *Brücke*; [lɪd'ə] *liegen*

The old combinations /nd/ and /ng/ after palatal vowels have changed to /nj/:

[hɛn'] *Hände*; [zɪn'ə] *singen*

Irregular is [n'] following [ʉ] in [hʉn'] *Hunde*

It is believed that this palatalization may be the result of influence from Frisian. In this language, however, palatalization has a much more limited range and is restricted to old /k/ in front of palatal vowels where it has changed to [tʃ] (written as <tsj>), or, more seldom, [ts] (many words having parallel forms):

tsjerke, compare High German *Kirche*; *tsjettel – Kessel tsiis – Käse*; *tsifje – keifen*

Most probably, the palatalization in Plautdiitsch has not arisen as a direct result of influence from Frisian. It is likely that some of the Low German dialects from which Plautdiitsch evolved owed their palatalization to Frisian (settlers from Eastern Friesland moved to the Danzig region in the Middle Ages), and in Plautdiitsch this process developed further.

Palatalization is a phenomenon that is found in many other European languages, e.g. English, Swedish (Wessén 1958) and Norwegian, the Slavonic languages (Vlasto 1986), and Latvian (Rudzīte 1993). The word *cherry*, for example, is [t'joɐʃ] in Plautdiitsch, *körsbär* with initial [ɕ] in Swedish, *čerešn'a* in Russian, *ķirsis* in Latvian, *kers* in Frisian and Dutch, and *Kirsche* in German; English *chain* is [t'eːd] in Plautdiitsch, *kedja* with initial [ɕ] in Swedish, *cep'* in Russian, *ķede* in Latvian, *ketting* in Dutch,

keatling in Frisian, and *Kette* in German. In Plautdiitsch, the palatalized consonant can be separated from the (originally) palatal vowel by another consonant, a phenomenon otherwise only (sporadically) found in some Slavic languages. It has been suggested palatalization may be the result of a *Sprachbund*, but since its realization in the various languages is quite different and the phenomenon seems to have appeared at different stages and in different circumstances, this question requires further study.

In general, Plautdiitsch shares many of the elements that distinguish the Low German dialects from High German. The sound changes [p] > [pf], [t] > [ts] that characterize the Southern German dialects did not occur in the north, e.g.: High German (HD) *Apfel*, Dutch (D) *appel*, Plautdiitsch (PD) [a:pəl]; HD *Zeit*, D *tijd*, PD [ti:t]. Low German also has a great number of words that are unknown in High German, but not in Dutch. Plautdiitsch [fəndɒɣ] (other Low German dialects have similar forms) *today*, is *vandaag* in Dutch, but *heute* in High German. These two elements give Plautdiitsch a very familiar ring to the Dutch ear. At the lexical level, the language of the Siberian Mennonites mirrors the history of these people. Most words are either common Low German, or known from various Low German dialects: [hy:s] *house*, [drɔk] *busy*, [maŋk] *between*.

Plautdiitsch also shares some features with High German, that are absent from other Low German dialects. This language played an important role in Mennonite society since it was the language of the Bible, but also the dividing line between Low and High German dialects runs rather far to the north in the east of the German speaking area. In High German, initial [s] before certain consonants has become [ʃ], in Low German, like in Dutch, old [s] survived. Plautdiitsch has [ʃ], e.g.: HG *still* with [ʃ], D *stil* with [s], PD [ʃtɛl]. The abundant use of vowel change (Umlaut) is also reminiscent of High German. Umlaut is often found in the plural of nouns, as in [hys-hi:ʁɐ], compare HG *Haus-Häuser*, D *huis-huizen*, and in the comparative of adjectives, as in [grɒut-jra:tɐ], HG *gross-grösser*, D *groot-groter*. In a few cases, Plautdiitsch has Umlaut in forms that are regular in High German, as in [t'li:n-t'la:ndɐ], HD *klein-kleiner*, or [ʃvoɐ-ʃva:ndɐ], HG *schwer-schwerer*. Apart from this, there are quite a few loans from High German. Many religious terms, of course, have the form they have in the (High German)

Bible, but also many other High German words have entered the Plautdiitsch vocabulary. The word for *sweets*, [mətspu:n], was derived from High German *Marzipan*. Other loans have substituted Plautdiitsch forms, for example [ɛrntə] from HG *Ernte*.

A third category consists of words that Plautdiitsch shares with the other Weichsel delta area dialects. These varieties became extinct after World War II, when the Germans living here had to leave. In their new environment, they did not pass on their dialects to the next generation. It is estimated that there once were some 300 words that were found in this area only. From these, few seem to have survived the journey to Siberia, one example being [e:mst'ə] *ant*.

Most of the hundred or so loanwords from Dutch (Tolksdorf 1990) found in dialects spoken in the Weichsel delta area have disappeared from Siberian Plautdiitsch. A few survivors are [o:lba:səm] from Dutch *aalbes, black currant*, [mɔ:] or [me:v] from D *mouw, sleeve*, [ta:xəntiç] with initial [t] as in D *tachtig, eighty*. The word [pi:niç] is the descendant of *pijnlijk* (obsolete in this meaning), *diligent* – in Plautdiitsch it has come to mean *quick*.

Frisian seems not to have left many traces in the Plautdiitsch lexicon, but of Frisian origin is unquestionably [t'a:st] *wedding*, from Frisian *kest, choice*. The word [ʃvi:nt'ət'a:st] *the slaughtering of a pig* must originally have meant *choosing a pig to be slaughtered*.

Plautdiitsch has many words which have an unclear etymology. A few examples are [fʉp] *pocket*, [kʉfəl] *cup*, [prɪps] *surrogate coffee*, [lɛmp] *leg of trousers*. The word [dɔ:mpɐ] *moped* is a recent Plautdiitsch invention, built up from [dɔ:mp] *steam* and the suffix [-ɐ], compare HG *Dampfer, steamship*.

Many more words were derived from the Slavonic languages spoken by neighbouring peoples in Prussia, the Ukraine and Russia. The words [blɔt], [blɔtɪç] *mud, muddy*, [prɔst] *easy* are Polish loans which must have been borrowed when the Mennonites were living in the Weichsel area. Not unexpectedly, Russian is the language from which most new terms have beem derived, e.g. [məʃi:n] meaning not only *machine*, but also – as in Russian – *car*. Older are loans like [rəby:z] from *arbuz (water melon)*, [flɪtsəpəɪ] *bicycle* from *velosiped* (the Russian word being a loan from French), and [da:ɣət] *tar* from *d'egot'*. A recent loan is [sɪr] *cheese* from *syr*, replacing [t'e:z], which is still known but rarely used. Apart from this, Sibirian Plautdiitsch has some calques from Russian, such as [y:tʃri:və] *buying the allotted*

amount of goods from the kolkhoz, [təue:tə] *having a snack with the vodka*, and its counterpart [təudrɪn't'ə] *wash down the food*. In everyday speech, many more Russian words and expressions are used, even if there is a Plautdiitsch counterpart. Nouns can be used without major adjustments to Plautdiitsch phonology, verbs must be altered. Almost any Russian verb ending in /-at'/ can be adapted to Plautdiitsch phonological rules by changing the ending to [-e:jə]: [vɪpi:ve:jə], [gʉlje:jə] *drink, booze*, [rəʃe:jə] *decide* etc.

A recording we made in the village of Protasovo in the Altai Region, shows how freely Plautdiitsch can be mixed with Russian words and phrases. We give this example in a phonological spelling based partly on the system used in Plautdiitsch literature in Canada. In this spelling, the following graphemes are used (explanations are given where necessary):

consonants

p	t	tj [t']	k		
f	s	sch [ʃ]	ch,jch [ç]	ch [x]	h
b	d	dj [d']	g		
w [v]	z	zsch [ʒ]	j	gh [ɣ]	
m	n	nj [n']	ng [ŋ]		
	r	l			

vowels

short			long			
i [ɪ]	u [ʉ]		ii [i:]	ü [y:]	uu [u:]	
e [ɛ]	o [ɔ]		ee [e:]		(oo [o:])	
	a [ɐ]			aa [a:]	au [ɔ:]	

diphthongs

ie [iə]	ue [uə]				
ea [eɐ]	oa [oɐ]	ei [eɪ]	(au [ɔuc] au)	öi [əɪ]	öu [əu]

In the following text the Russian parts are given in italics.

Ooba nü es noch zöune pröubleem, *vot* nü krekt *pozavčera*, juu moondach, *predsedatel' kolchoza* zöi, zecht e, nü kuume weenja emigrante fon de aundre *respubliki*, döi ha..., zent doch wol

opjewaakt en *ponjali*, waun ruse öuda *russkojazyčnyje* waun döi aule waajchfoare daun es tjöina nich töum schaufe. *Jug naprimer*, waut zent doa, doa zent *kak, kočujuščie plemena* meist jezaajcht, döi *v osnovnom na zavodax, na proizvodstve zanjato russkojazyčnoje naselenie. Oni teper' vidimo* dit döune aul tridjtraatje, wiilst döi haa doch wol feschtuune daut ruse aule waajchfoare dan es doch tsiimlich *oščutimyj krax budet kakoj-to u nix tam.* Doaweajen *pereselency* zent hie ema weenja, döi moake aulahaunt *prepony*, döi fetjöipe deen de kvartöire nich, daut döi nich kune hie waut tjöipe, wöitst, en hie zent tjöine kvartöire, *bol'šoj spros potomu-čto, den'gi stoit.* En de meiste tjöipe döi kvartöire nich.

English translation:

But now there also is this problem, the day before yesterday, Monday, the Chairman of the Kolkhoz said, he says now fewer emigrants from the other republics come, they have..., they have come to their senses and they understand, when all the Russians or the Russian-speaking people leave, then there won't be anyone left to do the work. In the South for instance, what do we have there, there we have nomadic tribes, and in the factories you mainly have Russian-speaking people. And now they changed there attitude because they understand that if all the Russians leave things will collapse there. That's why there are fewer emigrants now, they make all kinds of obstacles, they don't sell them any houses, so they can't buy anything here, you know, and here there are no houses, because the demand is so big, they are very expensive. And most of them don't buy those houses.

4. Conclusion

In the Germanic language family, Plautdiitsch claims a special place. Its long isolation from other German dialects and its close contacts with other (Slavonic) languages have given it a specific character, which to some extent can be compared to that of Yiddish. The Plautdiitsch language, the sole descendant from the many West Prussian Low German dialects once spoken in the Weichsel delta area,

is now spoken by Mennonites in many countries and has partly taken over the religious factor as the main identity marker. It is a pity that a language, that managed to survive centuries of isolation and many years of prohibition, should now disappear where it has long had its most speakers – in Siberia. The increasing emigration to Germany has left many Mennonite villages more russified than decades of Soviet Russification policy could accomplish. The Plautdiitsch speakers who choose to stay find it more and more difficult to provide their children with a Plautdiitsch speaking environment, and in the long run it must be feared the language will lose much ground to Russian. In Germany, the children of Russian Mennonite immigrants will almost certainly only have passive knowledge of Plautdiitsch (Stölting-Richert 1993). One can only hope the language will survive in North America and in the isolated colonies in South America, where a revival can be observed.

Vakgroep Taalwetenschap
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
Postbus 716
9700 AS Groningen

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