

Plautdietsch: Origins, Development and State of the Mennonite Low German Language

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This paper attempts to describe the origins of *Plautdietsch*, how it became the tongue of the Netherlandic-Prussian-Russian Mennonites, where it fits into the mosaic of the Low German family of dialects, and where its literary development stands in relation to other dialects of Low German.

In order to better understand the origins and place of the *Plautdietsch* dialect within the Low German language it is necessary to explore briefly the history and development of the language as a whole. The history of Low German can be divided into three periods, the Old Low German or Old Saxon period, the Middle Low German period and the New (or Modern) Low German period.

Old Low German (*Altniederdeutsch*) or Old Saxon (*Altsächsisch*) describes Low German from the time before the Anglo Saxon invasion of the British Isles until about 1050 AD.¹ The Middle Low German (*Mittelniederdeutsch*) period is generally considered to be that beginning in the early 1200s² and ending with the decline and failure of the Hanseatic League in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.³ The New Low German (*Neuniederdeutsch*) period is considered to be that period beginning with a new era in Low German literature set in motion by writers Groth, Reuter and Brinckmann in the 1850s.⁴

Old Low German

Old Low German, also known as Old Saxon, together with German, English and the Nordic languages, found its origin in the Germanic language group.⁵ Low German and English evolved more particularly

from the Northsea Germanic⁶ which did not undergo the shifting of consonants that took place in High German.⁷ Old Low German appears to have developed among the Angles, Jutes and Saxons in the northern part of central Europe, the Saxons having been centered in the area currently known as Holstein, from whence they spread southward and westward on the continent as far as Normandy, and from whence they eventually crossed the English Channel to the British Isles.⁸

This movement to Britain in the fourth and fifth centuries explains the common roots and similarities between Low German and English, which are still apparent. J. F. Bense writes: "As English is itself a Low German dialect, we prefer to use the term Low Dutch in reference to the sister dialects . . ."⁹

Although the Old Low German period continued until about 1050 AD, remnants of Old Low German literature dating back to that period are mostly fragmentary. One of the works that has been retained is a poem by an unknown author in about the year 850 and entitled *Heliand* (*Saviour*). Another poem entitled *Genesis* was also written by an unknown author at about the same time but is no longer complete. There then appears to be a lull in Low German writing for some two centuries.

Middle Low German

During the Hanseatic League's period of activity, which began slowly in the eleventh century, the earlier two centuries saw a steady stream of settlers moving eastward from north central Europe, colonizing Slavic territories and the shores of the Baltic with people who spoke Low German. In the century of commercial development before 1350 AD, the Hanseatic merchants abroad led the way.¹⁰

The Hanseatic League, being a commercial union of northern continental European cities with Lübeck as its centre, established business and trading offices in those foreign trading countries with whom they dealt. Subsequently, there were large offices in Novgorod, Russia, in Bergen, Norway, in London, England and in Brügge, Flanders, all of which were in continuous written communication with the central office in Lübeck as well as with each other. Since the staff, officers and representatives of the League were Low German, League business and correspondence was conducted in Low German of Lübeck orientation.¹¹ Even in Stockholm, Sweden, much Low German was spoken well into the sixteenth century.¹² The Low German of the Hanse had in fact largely displaced Latin as business and official language.¹³

As a result of the business activities of the Hanseatic League coupled with the territorial expansions of the Teutonic Order of Knights,¹⁴ Low German peoples had spread across northern Europe to the extent that the language was spoken in the highest circles from Brügge to Memel and

from Bergen to Novgorod.¹⁵ It had become the language of authority, of administration, of business, of recorded history and of religious devotion.¹⁶

In the century between 1325 and 1425 AD, the written language of business and correspondence in Denmark and Sweden very nearly became Low German.¹⁷ In 1366 the kings of Denmark and Sweden signed a treaty written in Low German concerning jurisdiction over the Island of Gotland.¹⁸ The Peace of Stralsund, signed by the Danish Privy Council and the Hanseatic League in 1370 was written in Low German.¹⁹ This treaty brought the Hanseatic League to the peak of its power and influence. A famous code of Maritime Law first printed in Visby on the Island of Gotland in 1505 was written in Low German.²⁰ Low German had attained function and rank as an international written and business language long before that of High German.²¹

It is of particular interest to Low German Mennonites that Menno Simons began writing in local dialects after his departure from Witmarsum in West Friesland in about 1536. His writings during the years 1537–41, apparently in the province of Groningen, were termed by the Dutch of Holland as “eastern-coloured” (*Oosters gekleurd*) because they showed influences of language to the east of Holland. As he moved farther east into northern Germany, his written language underwent further change and was then termed to be “eastern” (*Oosters*).²² When he finally settled near Oldesloe in Holstein in about 1554 his subsequent writings and revisions of earlier works were undertaken in the local Schleswig–Holstein dialect of Low German until his death in 1561.

The Decline of Low German

Since the Low German language had grown to international importance as the language of the Hanseatic League,²³ its future was tied to that of the League. Changing business conditions of the sixteenth century doomed the League to eventual failure.²⁴ As the fortunes of the Hanse declined, the status of Low German also declined under increased competition from other countries.²⁵ By the end of the sixteenth century, the Hanseatic world together with its business, political and cultural influences had so deteriorated that it disappeared entirely in the seventeenth century.²⁶ Along with it went the Low German written language. It lost its significance as a written language for some two centuries.²⁷

The Reformation

The Reformation certainly was not the cause of the downfall of Low German as a written language.²⁸ But, when a people sees its culture and language disintegrate, it becomes more receptive to the language and culture of a more successful people.²⁹ Low German gradually ceased

being the overall written language and yielded to the High German of the successful south. It continued for a long time in written form as a disdained second-rate language to be used only in jest, in ridicule and for amusement.³⁰

Martin Luther, who himself grew up in a Low German neighborhood, gave weight to the Reformation concept that the New Gospel should be spread in the language of the local people. But he could not prevent an ever-increasing number of teachers and pastors from coming to northern Germany from the High German south.³¹ Luther's Bible and other works were translated into Low German for the edification of the Low German people of the north. The Bible translation was undertaken by Johanness Bugenhagen, apparently with a staff of students at the University of Wittenberg. This particularly un-Low German translation was simply a copy of Luther's High German Bible in which every High German word had been replaced with one in Low German. That was of course not the way that Low German could be written — then or now.³² The Bugenhagen Bible was an affront to the Low German language and turned out to be a failure.³³

Within the Reformation movement there were too few northern universities to teach theology in Low German to counterbalance the flow of High German theologians and pastors trained in southern universities. Schleswig-Holstein and all of northwestern Germany had not a single theological training centre.³⁴ Consequently, theological trainees from the south far exceeded in number those from the north, with the result that northern vacancies, frequently leading positions, were filled with men who had trained in High German only.

This set in motion the language conversion (*Verhochdeutschung*) of the northern Lutheran church organization and an accompanying dogmatic approach toward matters of language, church or faith. As a result, congregations came to regard their High German, black-clothed pastor as "the black gendarme." The congregations accommodated this change with the attitude: "Let those-up-there talk and write. We can't understand it in any event." The voice of the people was no longer heard, nor was their language.³⁵ The High German language came to be regarded as a holy creation of Luther, and the use of another language in church services was regarded as a sin against the spirit of Luther.³⁶

Among the educated it became commonplace to refrain from using Low German and to disdain those who did so openly.³⁷ It became popular for business people to send their sons to southern universities during their educational years "because of the language."³⁸ Supposedly educated people predicted that Low German would die out altogether within a few decades and that Low German never again would be elevated to a literary language. It was considered to be a hindrance to social culture.³⁹

As recently as 1924 Ziesemer wrote: "There exists in widespread circles, even among the educated, the prevailing attitude that the language spoken by the common people has a lower rank; it is only the degraded speech of the ordinary people, from which one must keep one's distance."⁴⁰ It was considered by some to be beneficial and possible to eradicate the Low German language altogether.⁴¹

The prevalence of such attitudes led to the eighteenth century becoming the century of discrimination against the dialects in Germany. In spite of this, and being unoppressed by such machinations, a Dutch congregation on the Island of Amack near Copenhagen preserved and reprinted their Lutheran hymnals, catechisms and prayer-books in Low German until 1788.⁴²

The Mennonite Migration to the Vistula

By the time of the Mennonite migration from the Netherlands to the Vistula delta about 1550 and thereafter, the former Friesish language of the present provinces of Groningen (Netherlands) and East Friesland (Germany) had been substantially supplanted by Low German.⁴³ However, the language of church services and of written communications was Dutch, even in East Friesland. The only High German heard among those Mennonites at that time was that of travellers or of religious refugees from southern Germany or from Switzerland seeking haven among the Anabaptists in the more tolerant Netherlands. Consequently, the Mennonites of the Netherlands⁴⁴ at that time spoke mainly Low German⁴⁵ with some variation in dialect between the Frisian and Flemish ethnic groups. There were of course among them some families who spoke Dutch, Friesish or High German.

When in the mid-1500s these Netherlandic Mennonites migrated to the delta of the Vistula River in what later became known as West Prussia, they settled into an area that already had been inhabited by a resident Low German population since the thirteenth century.⁴⁶ Understandably, it was a different dialect, but Low German nevertheless. The Mennonites of the Vistula delta assimilated the dialect of the people in the area into which they settled, but their impact upon the language was enough to introduce into their new dialect (*Plautdietsch*) more than 60 words⁴⁷ from their former dialects in the Netherlands.

They continued to use Low German in their day-to-day discourse but used Dutch as the language of worship, of record-keeping and for written communication until the second half of the eighteenth century, when Dutch gave way to High German.⁴⁸ Low German in their more recently acquired dialect continued to be the language of the home and among friends as it does among Mennonites in many places to this day. This *Plautdietsch* dialect is of course still used by people of other persuasions whose forefathers inhabited the same area of West Prussia.

The Migration to Russia

The Chortitza Mennonite settlement began on and around the Island of Chortitza (near the present city of Zaporozhje) in the province of Ekaterinoslav of South Russia (Ukraine) in 1789. These first settlers from Prussia were mainly from among the poorer people around the city of Danzig, and mostly from the Flemish branch of the church. The wealthier ones, being property owners, had until then been denied passports.⁴⁹

About 15 years later, during the years 1804–06 a second major contingent of Mennonites left West Prussia to settle the Molotschna area in the Ukrainian province of Taurida about 100 miles southeast of Chortitza and just to the north of the Sea of Asov. However, these later colonists came from a more prosperous segment of the Mennonite population of West Prussia, and mainly from the regions of Marienburg and Elbing.⁵⁰

Although many Mennonite history books are not very specific as to the exact locations in Prussia from whence the Mennonite migrants came, they do state that the Chortitza settlers came mainly from Danzig and that the Molotschna settlers came mainly from Marienburg and Elbing. When one considers that most of the Mennonites were farmers and that most Prussian cities, except Danzig, were inclined to exclude Mennonites from their citizenry⁵¹ it becomes clear that most of the migrants came from the rural areas around those cities. For Danzig this included the Danzig Lowlands (Niedrung) on the lower left reaches of the Vistula. For Marienburg it included the Marienburger Werder (Grosses Werder and Kleines Werder) and for Elbing it included the Ellerwald district, the lower reaches to the right of the Nogat river and the Frisches Haff. These areas represent almost the entire Vistula delta, which was the major area of Mennonite settlement in Prussia.

Dialectical Variations in Plautdietsch

Mennonite language students of this century have questioned the marked differences in dialect between the Chortitza (Old Colony) and Molotschna colonists. Less attention has been given to dialectical differences within each of the colonies. When one considers that the combined area of East and West Prussia was some 24,000 square miles (less than half the size of Florida or one tenth the size of Manitoba) but contained nine different dialects of Low German (Nether Prussian),⁵² of which *Plautdietsch* is one, in addition to two dialects of High Prussian plus one of Schwäbisch, it becomes understandable that people in the Vistula delta spoke differently from each other if they lived more than a few miles apart.

Such were the differences among the settlers from Danzig, Marienburg and Elbing. The city of Danzig lies about 30 miles from the other two cities and on opposite sides of both the Vistula and Nogat rivers. There—

fore the Chortitza settlers spoke one sub-dialect of *Plautdietsch*, with variations, at the time of their settlement in Russia, whereas the Molotschna settlers spoke another sub-dialect with probably even greater variations among them because of the distance between Marienburg and Elbing. These differences, especially those between the two major colonies in Russia, are still quite apparent among their descendants to this day. The speech differences within the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies are also still apparent, but perhaps to a lesser degree.

Following are some of the speech differences that existed in those areas of West Prussia populated by the Mennonites and which were later observed to exist in their speech as differences between, but also among, the two colonies:⁵³

to chew	v.	—	kaue, kauen, keiwe, keiwen
to cook	v.	—	koke, koake, koaken, köaken
am	v.	—	sie, senn
sheet	n.	—	Loke, Loake, Loaken, Löaken
to buy	v.	—	kjeepe, kjeepen, koope
gave	v.	—	gauf, jeef
to mow, to strike	v.	—	haue, heiwe, heiwen
mowed or struck	v.	—	jehaue, jehaut, jeheiw
small	adj.	—	kjleen, kjlien
cow	n.	—	Kooh, Kjlemp, Kjres

The Age of spoken Low German

With the demise of the Hanseatic League in the seventeenth century, Low German faded from the written page and dropped from the scene as a written language.⁵⁴ The last Low German play of literary rank to be written at that time was in 1584.⁵⁵

Although Low German was no longer written, it continued through the centuries to be the spoken language of millions of people from Brügge in Flanders to Memel in East Prussia, not to mention the many settlements of the far-flung Mennonites. In 1945 almost all German-speaking people were removed from Prussia, but Low German is still spoken from Flanders to East Germany.⁵⁶ Low German does not always go by the same name. In Flanders, the Flemish Low German dialect is called *Vlaams* or *Vlaamsch*; in the Dutch province of Groningen it is called *Groningsch*, *Groningisch* or *Nedersaksisch*, whereas in Prussia it was called *Niederpreussisch*. In Germany it may be called *Plattdütsch* (in Low German), *Plattddeutsch*, *Niederdeutsch* or *Niedersächsisch*. All of the foregoing terms apply to the same language in various dialects and in different places.

The Low German language does not exist in a standardized form, but in numerous dialects,⁵⁷ *Plautdietsch* being one of them. Specht says

that all speakers of Low German speak dialect because the language exists in theory only.⁵⁸ The term "Platt" in Plattdeutsch does not only mean "flat" as relating to the flat, low-lying countryside in which most of the Low Germans live, but rather stems from a Netherlandic word that denotes clear or understandable.⁵⁹ When a Low German person is confronted with words that he cannot grasp, he may well say, "*Kannst mie dat nich platt seggen?*"

Among the various estimates as to the number of people who understand and speak Low German today some run to six million. Accuracy in such estimates is hard to achieve in view of the numbers who understand and speak, those who understand but do not speak, and those who do some of either or both. Radio NDR of Hamburg, Germany, which broadcasts regular Low German programming, records a regular radio listening audience for these broadcasts of 1 million, and occasionally rising to 1.9 to 2.1 million. When these numbers are added to the listening audience for similar Low German broadcasts from Radio Bremen, from WDR in Münster and from Radio Kiel, the magnitude of the Low German radio listening audience becomes clearer.⁶⁰

The Renaissance in Low German

The new age for Low German literature was set in motion by Klaus Groth in 1852 with his publication of *Quickborn* in the dialect of Schleswig-Holstein. This was followed by Fritz Reuter in 1853 with his publication of *Läuschen un Riemels* in the dialect of Mecklenburg. A few years later John Brinckmann came out with his publication in 1859 of *Vagel Grip*, also in the dialect of Mecklenburg.⁶¹ Since that time there have been many hundreds of new Low German publications in Germany. The Institut für Niederdeutsche Sprache of Bremen lists 267 new or republications in or about Low German for the year 1983 alone.⁶² This figure is beside that of 127 magazines, calendars, almanacs and yearbooks in Low German plus numerous theatrical plays, radio plays, records and tape recordings in that year. All of the foregoing are of course in dialects other than Mennonite *Plautdietsch*.

There have also been numerous religious works, among them *Dat Nie Testament* by Ernest Voss in the Mecklenburg dialect in 1960 and *Dat Nieu Testament* by Rudolf Muuss in the Holstein dialect published in 1975. Since the middle of the nineteenth century Low German writers have produced a more continuous and greater flow of dialect literature than can be matched by writers in any other language.⁶³

A number of universities in Germany now have Chairs of Low German Studies. A major work of higher studies in this field was released by authors Cordes and Möhn in 1983.⁶⁴ A new Low German dictionary encompassing various dialects in Germany (other than Westphalian and Prussian) was released by Wolfgang Lindow in 1984.⁶⁵

A major Prussian language dictionary, including *Plautdietsch*, was begun by Ziesemer in 1935 after many years of preparation.⁶⁶ It ended in 1944 after the publication of "A" to "Fingernagel." The entire compilation of many years of research by himself and his staff, consisting of a million or more cards in 122 packing cases was totally destroyed under artillery fire. The resumption and continuation of this work was undertaken by Erhard Riemann at the University of Kiel, who in 1974 resumed publication after "Fingernagel." This work is being published in installments which by 1986 have reached up to "lang."⁶⁷

Conclusion

The *Plautdietsch* dialect of the Netherlandic Low German Mennonites is one that they acquired in the Vistula delta of West Prussia. As such it fits into the eastern end of the mosaic of Low German dialects that stretched across northern Europe from Flanders in Belgium to Memel in East Prussia. However, since it has ties to the Low German of the Netherlands in the form of many words that were brought from the Netherlands and retained in the newer dialect of West Prussia, the relationship of *Plautdietsch* to other dialects of Low German is one of spanning from East to West of the Low German language zone. It is recognized by scholars as a West Prussian dialect of the Low German family of dialects, and is understood by speakers of other dialects. It shares the history of Low German, including the centuries-long period of literary silence and the resurgence of written Low German.

Notes

A number of the following notes refer to various sections of a reference textbook released by authors Gerhard Cordes and Dieter Möhn, *Handbuch zur niederdeutschen Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft*, (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 1983). It contains essays by a number of scholars who deal with various facets of Low German studies. In order to avoid repeated identification of the same book and the same publisher, these notes will provide the name of each author referred to, the subject title and the abbreviation "NSL" to identify the aforementioned reference textbook.

¹Ingrid Dal, "Altniederdeutsch und seine Vorstufen," *NSL*, p. 78. See also Johann Diedrich Bellmann, "Niederdeutsch als Kirchensprache," *Ibid.* p. 608.

²*Ibid.* pp. 108-609.

³Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, pp. 113-116.

⁴Jörg Eiben-von Hertell, "Lyrik," *NSL*, p. 423.

⁵"Germanic Languages," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1971 edition, Vol. 10, p. 237.

⁶Christopher Moss, "Niederdeutsch-Englische Sprachzusammenhänge," *NSL*, p. 661.

⁷Harry Loewen and Al Reimer, "Origins and Literary Development of Canadian-Mennonite Low German," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 1985) p. 279.

⁸Ingrid Dal, "Altniederdeutsch und seine Vorstufen," *NSL*, p. 79.

⁹Christopher Moss, "Niederdeutsch-Englische Sprachzusammenhänge," *NSL*, p. 660. This is a quotation from J. F. Bense, *A Dictionary of the Low Dutch Element in the English Language* (The Hague, 1939), p. 660.

¹⁰"Hanseatic League," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 11, p. 71-74.

- ¹¹Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, pp. 111–112.
- ¹²*Ibid.*, p. 108.
- ¹³Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 119.
- ¹⁴Walther Ziesemer, *Die Ostpreussischen Mundarten* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig oHG., 1970), p. 101.
- ¹⁵Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 119.
- ¹⁶Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, p. 99.
- ¹⁷Karl Hyldgaard-Jensen, "Mittelniederdeutsch und die skandinavischen Sprachen," *NSL*, p. 675.
- ¹⁸Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 131.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ²⁰"Gotland," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 10, p. 609.
- ²¹Claus Schuppenhauer, *Niederdeutsch Heute* (Leer, Ostfriesland: Verlag Schuster, 1976), p. 5.
- ²²Cornelius Krahn, "Oosters and Oosters gekleurd," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 4, p. 70.
- ²³Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 120.
- ²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 123.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 122.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 124.
- ²⁷Jörg Eiben-von Hertell, "Lyrik," *NSL*, p. 417.
- ²⁸Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, p. 116.
- ²⁹Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 124.
- ³⁰Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, p. 116.
- ³¹*Ibid.*, p. 116.
- ³²Fritz Specht, *Platdeutsch wie es nicht im Wörterbuch steht* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Heinrich Scheffler, 1969) p. 16.
- ³³Johann Diedrich Bellmann, "Niederdeutsch als Kirchensprache," *NSL*, p. 614.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 616.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 617.
- ³⁶Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 136.
- ³⁷Karl Bischoff, "Mittelniederdeutsch," *NSL*, p. 115.
- ³⁸Artur Gabrielsson, "Die Verdrängung der mittelniederdeutschen durch die neu-hochdeutsche Schriftsprache," *NSL*, p. 125.
- ³⁹Dieter Möhn, "Geschichte der niederdeutschen Mundarten," *NSL*, p. 155.
- ⁴⁰Walther Ziesemer, *Die Ostpreussischen Mundarten*, (Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig oHG., 1970) p. III.
- ⁴¹Johann Diedrich Bellmann, "Niederdeutsch als Kirchensprache," *NSL*, p. 618.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 618.
- ⁴³Arne Spenter, "Niederdeutsch-friesische Interferenzen," *NSL*, p. 767.
- ⁴⁴The Netherlands here referred to are the geographic Netherlands which include the German province of East Friesland.
- ⁴⁵Benjamin Heinrich Unruh, *Die Niederländisch-Niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen* (Karlsruhe: Im Selbstverlag, 1955), p. 123.
- ⁴⁶Walther Ziesemer, *Die Ostpreussischen Mundarten* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig oHG., 1970), pp. 101–103.
- ⁴⁷Erhard Riemann, *Preussisches Wörterbuch* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1974), p. 6. A comparative study of Plautdietsch and the dialects of the Netherlands appears to indicate that the figure of "more than 60" indicated by Riemann might be vastly exceeded by the results of a more thoroughgoing analysis.
- ⁴⁸C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publication Office, 1957) p. 279.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 387. See also "Chortitza Mennonite Settlement," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1, p. 569.

⁵⁰C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, p. 397.

⁵¹C. J. Dyck, *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1967), p. 94.

⁵²Erhard Riemann, *Preussisches Wörterbuch* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1974), Bd. 1, Lfg. 1, p. 3. Riemann lists seven dialects of Netherprussian. Walther Ziesemer, *Die Ostpreussischen Mundarten* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Martin Sändig oHG., 1970), lists nine dialects of Netherprussian, p. 137.

⁵³The words listed are taken not only from Riemann's alphabetical listings but also from his many reference quotations throughout the dictionary. Spellings are those of this writer.

⁵⁴Dieter Möhn, "Geschichte der neuniederdeutschen Mundarten," *NSL*, p. 165.

⁵⁵Ulf Bichel, "Drama," *NSL*, p. 392.

⁵⁶"Languages of the World," *New Encyclopaedia Britannica Ready Reference*, Vol. 22, p. 665.

⁵⁷Dieter Möhn, "Geschichte der neuniederdeutschen Mundarten," *NSL*, p. 159.

⁵⁸Fritz Specht, *Plattdeutsch wie es nicht im Wörterbuch steht* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Heinrich Scheffler, 1969) p. 11.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁶⁰Dieter Möhn, "Geschichte der neuniederdeutschen Mundarten," *NSL*, p. 175.

⁶¹Jörg Eiben-von Hertell, "Lyrik," *NSL*, p. 423.

⁶²Friedrich W. Michelson, *Plattdeutsche Bibliographie* (Bremen: Institut für Niederdeutsche Sprache, 1986), Nr. 1.

⁶³Claus Schuppenhauer, *Niederdeutsch Heute* (Leer, Ostfriesland: Verlag Schuster, 1976), p. 6.

⁶⁴Gerhard Cordes und Dieter Möhn, *NSL*.

⁶⁵Wolfgang Lindow, *Plattdeutsches Wörterbuch* (Leer, Ostfriesland: Schuster Verlag, 1984).

⁶⁶Walther Ziesemer, *Preussisches Wörterbuch* (München: Verlag Gräfe und Unzer, 1939-44), "A-Fi."

⁶⁷Erhard Riemann, *Preussisches Wörterbuch* (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz Verlag, 1974-). Note: Riemann has since died and the work has been taken up by Ulrich Tolksdorf.

Appendix

A new era in Mennonite Low German literature was begun in Russia in 1912 by Jacob H. Janzen. Further developments in Mennonite Low German literature in Canada have been outlined in some detail by authors Harry Loewen and Al Reimer, "Origins and Literary Development of Canadian-Mennonite Low German," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* (July 1985), pp. 279-86.

A Mennonite author of literary note whose works have received very little written comment in Canada is Wilhelmine Siefkes of Leer, East Friesland. Her works are not well known among Mennonites because they are written in the East Friesian dialect of Low German, a dialect that was known to our Netherlandic forebears but is now strange to us. Her novel *Keerlke*, first published in 1940, is acclaimed as the most noteworthy social-critical novel in Low German since Reuter. *Keerlke* means "Kerlchen" in German and "Kjeadelkje" in *Plaudietsch*. It is the story of a young lad growing up in a poor home under a drunken father, and the

mental martyrdom of the boy on his way toward adjustment to these tragic circumstances. This book was first written and published under a pseudonym because Siefkes had been prohibited to write by the Nazis whom she opposed. Not only did she get away with it, but this novel also won the Johann-Hinrich-Fehrs-Preis (Literary Award) for literature in 1940. Siefkes has also written a good number of other books in her native Low German of East Friesland. Her post-war novel *Van de Padd of* (Hamburg-Wellingsbüttel: Verlag der Fehrs-Gilde, 1961) continues in the same noteworthy literary style. This title in English is "Off the Path," meaning off the straight and narrow. It is the story of a post-war refugee woman with two children who finds shelter in the home of a host farming couple in East Friesland. Siefkes delicately and compassionately describes the moral conflicts that arise when a woman of child-bearing age lives with a childless couple who desperately want an heir but the wife is unable to bear children. Some time before her death at age 94 in 1984 Siefkes wrote her memoirs (*Erinnerungen*) which explain her conversion to Mennonitism. This book was written in High German.

An East Prussian Mennonite Low German storyteller, Trude Janz, who is also little known in Canada, lives near Hamburg, Germany. She tells her stories in an East Prussian Low German dialect that is not *Plautdietsch* but resembles it enough to make easy and interesting reading for those who read *Plautdietsch*. Since Trude Janz is not a writer, she has dictated her stories to Ulrich Tolksdorf who has written and published them in a book of 425 pages, *Eine Ostpreussische Volkserzählerin* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1980). Her interesting stories, fables and accounts of events coupled with a phenomenal storytelling ability and an engaging style make this book most interesting reading for anyone who reads Mennonite Low German.