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# Contrasting Spaces in Plautdietsch: Language Variation and Change

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**Abstract:** In this article, I explore linguistic variation in Plautdietsch through the lens of social variation and the resulting redistribution of linguistic forms across the community. Language change requires variation in a population and a social pathway for the variation to be distributed (or redistributed) across a community. This article explores two systems of variation in the Plautdietsch language as it is used across North America: the so-called traditional dialect system (based on descriptions from Thiessen 1977, Epp 1993, and Rempel 1995, among others), and the vowel system (based on Nieuweboer 1998, Burns 2016a,b, among others). I propose that linguistic diversification in each system is socially driven by community members, signaling their commitment to both new and old social groups. I provide evidence that many of the social groups reflect heritable religious and spatial traits, which individuals may accept or reject. In this respect, the Plautdietsch language can reflect information not only related to an individual's physical location (e.g. specific locations in North America) but also the different ideological spaces existing within a given physical location. [Abstract by author.]

**Keywords:** religion; intersection; linguistic innovation; place and space; social commitment; dialectology; ideological commitment

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In traditional dialect studies, language variation is often represented as boundaries on maps showing sound or lexical variation by region. While it is known that Plautdietsch has variation linked to physical space, to date there are no comprehensive dialect maps showing the full extent of the location of variants. Those who want to know how Plautdietsch reached its present-day structure should be interested in variation because variation is a precursor to language change (Weinreich, et al. 1968). Without a better understanding of variation in Plautdietsch, we lack a full understanding of how and why the language came to be what it is today.

In this paper, I propose that “space” is a critical part of language variation and change in the Netherlandic Mennonite (henceforth Mennonite) community.<sup>1</sup> I propose that across the community, different types of spaces are relevant to language variation, and ultimately language change.<sup>2</sup> I discuss spatial language patterns through examining (a) the Plautdietsch traditional dialect system and (b) the Plautdietsch vowel system. While previous studies link variation in these systems to physical locations, I propose that social spaces, rather than physical ones, are more predictive of variation in some communities. In this respect, Mennonite language systems are subject to variation and change as ownership claims to social spaces are modified within the community. I view social spaces as integral to language change in Mennonite communities because they have become conceptually blended with religion. This means that as religious ideas and affiliations shift, individuals may align their speech to different locations as a signal of their religious position within the broader community.

The rest of section (§) 1 briefly outlines previous accounts of variation and space in the

Plautdietsch sound system. § 2 discusses “space” as a social system relevant to language variation and argues that “social space” is a complex system in the Mennonite community. Critically, the Mennonite community has developed social concepts pertaining to space that are interlocked with social concepts related to religion. This multiplex social trait has become heritable in the community, even though some communities have tried to reinstantiate a separation between the two. The remainder of this paper is dedicated to spatial-religious symbols in the Mennonite communities visited for this project. § 3 outlines non-linguistic spatial-religious symbols: notably inherited status on the Mennonite migration path and lifestyle symbols. §§ 4 and 5 investigate language as a spatial-religious symbol. § 4 presents the methodology for investigating Plautdietsch spatial-religious symbolism. Socially, pronunciation is examined from three spatial perspectives: physical residence, New World social space, and Old World social space. § 5 presents the results, which show that social spaces are the best spatial predictors of language variation. Based on conversations with community members, I propose that this finding is due to the use of language variation within a given physical space as a tool to define one’s membership in different contrasting religious communities.

### 1.1 Previous Accounts of Plautdietsch Variation

Traditionally, linguistic variation in Plautdietsch (Prussian Low German, West Germanic) is divided into two types: Chortitza and Molotschna (Quiring 1928; Thiessen 1977; Tolksdorf 1985; Epp 1993; Rempel 1995; Neufeld 2000). Examples of the differences between the two dialects are provided in Table 1. The orthographic representation is based on Rempel (1995) even though Plautdietsch is not a commonly written language. The Chortitza variant is always listed first in cases where the orthography distinguishes the two.

Plautdietsch-speakers have varying degrees of familiarity with the variants listed in Table 1. This is partially due to the fact that the system is undergoing change (Nieuweboer 1998; Rosenberg 2005; Burns 2016a). Early documentation of Plautdietsch-speaking Mennonites indicates that

<sup>1</sup> The term “Netherlandic Mennonite” is used to reference the specific population of Low German speakers. Members of the speech community in Kansas emphasized to me that not all Mennonite Plautdietsch speakers settled in Ukraine and the term Netherlandic Mennonite has been used to refer to the broader group by native speaker linguists such as Reuben Epp.

<sup>2</sup> This paper adopts the present-day country names for locations in Europe because state control of these spaces shifted often during the relevant time frame of the study.

TABLE 1. TRADITIONAL DIALECT VARIATION IN PLAUTDIETSCH

	Chortitza	Molotschna	Example
1. High Rounded Vowel	[y]	[ʉ]	<i>Hüt vs Hut</i> ‘skin’
2. Lexical Allophones	[ɛɪv]	[au]	<i>bleiw vs blau</i> ‘blue’
3. Low Opening Diphthong	[ɛɐ]	[ɔɐ]	<i>Doag</i> ‘days’ <sup>1</sup>
4. Palatal Plosives	<kj>, <gj>	<tj>, <dj>	<i>Kjint vs Tjint</i> ‘child’
5. Syllabic Nasal	–ŋ	–ə	<i>äten vs äte</i> ‘to eat’

the features in Table 1 are regional variants in Ukraine (Quiring 1928). The Chortitza variants are associated with a physical location called Chortitza (or the “Old Colony”) and the Molotschna variants are associated with a physical location called Molotschna (or the “New Colony”). Although the dialects are named after Ukrainian toponyms near historical Mennonite settlements, the variation represented in Table 1 is not geographically restricted to Ukraine. Records created by dialect geographers (e.g. Walther Mitzka, Georg Wenker) show that these variants existed in communities west of Ukraine whose settlement predated Mennonite migration to Ukraine.

Records from Poland show regional variation in Features 1-3 depending on region (Mitzka 1922, 119-24). Variants to the east of the Vistula River, close to the Vistula Spit, resemble the Chortitza dialect, but variants to the west of the Vistula River, closer to Gdańsk, resemble the Molotschna dialect. Variation in Feature 4 is a common property of Low German from Poland (Burns forthcoming). In the Vistula Delta, the palatal plosive was usually back (Mitzka 1922, 126), which is closer to the Chortitza form, but some regions to the west of the Vistula River had a front variant (Mitzka 1922, 126; Stammeler 1997, 1299-1300), which is closer to the Molotschna form. Feature 5 is found in both Dutch (the common language of Mennonites before moving to Poland) and Low German. In both languages, this feature is regional (Mitzka 1922, 128-29; Stammeler 1997, LXX; Van De Velde et al. 2010, 404-07). In Dutch, –ŋ is common in the south (Belgium, Flanders) while –ə is common in the north (the Netherlands, Friesland). In the Vistula Delta, –ŋ is common in the northeast, but –ə is common elsewhere. The northeast, where –ŋ occurs, also happens to be the same region where Features 1-3 also align with the Chortitza variant.

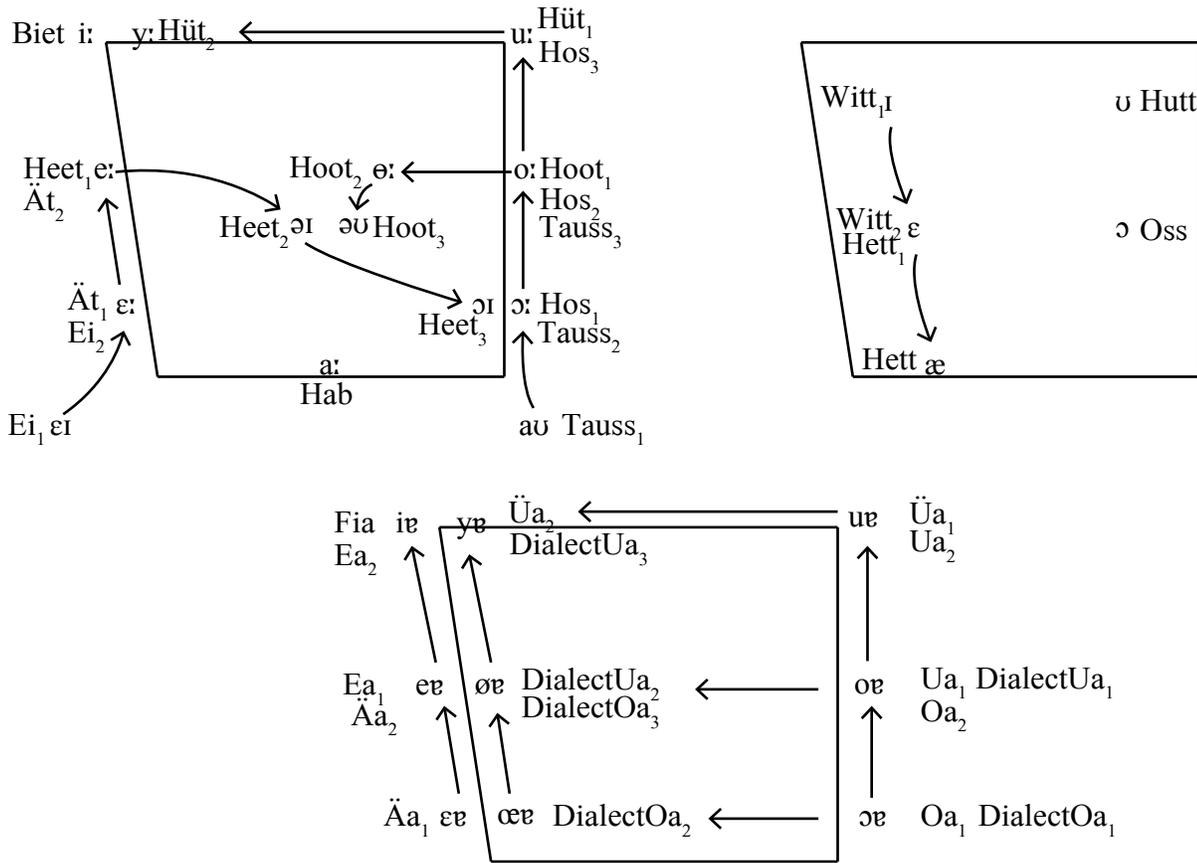
Taken together, the distinguishing Chortitza features historically point to the northeastern part

of the Vistula Delta in Poland while the Molotschna features are found elsewhere in Poland. One of the five features also indexes region in Dutch, which was the language of the Frisian and Flemish Mennonites prior to entering Poland. Southern Dutch (e.g., Flemish) uses –ŋ whereas northern Dutch (e.g., Frisian Dutch) uses –ə.

The traditional dialect system is not the only part of Plautdietsch that exhibits variability (Nieuweboer 1998; Burns 2016a, 2016b). Burns (2016a, 2016b) investigates vowel pronunciation based on sets of words defined by sound-similarity called *lexical classes*. For example, even though words like *heet* ‘hot’, *Ree* ‘deer’, and *Dreem* ‘dreams’ are represented with different phonetic characters across 12 different texts, within a single text, they are always represented with the same pronunciation. Based on this within-text consistency across all 12 sources, they are grouped into the same lexical class, which she labels HEET as a shorthand. In her survey, she identifies 21 vowel classes (9 long vowels/closing diphthongs, 8 opening diphthongs, and 4 short stressed vowels). Burns accounts for the differences across the 12 texts as a sound change known as a *vowel chain shift*. This type of sound change is like musical chairs. As the pronunciation of one vowel class changes, the pronunciation of another vowel class assumes its position in the vowel space (e.g. A, B, C > B, C, D). Figure 1 shows the trajectory of the changes in the Plautdietsch vowel chain shift using Burns’ (2016a) vowel class names. The 9 long vowel/closing diphthong classes are to the top left, the 4 short stressed vowel classes are to the top right, and the 8 opening diphthong classes are in the middle. Numerical subscripts with lower values represent earlier stages of the shift whereas higher values represent more advanced stages.

Burns proposes that vowel pronunciation is linked to (a) where documentation occurred and (b) when the document was produced. She pro-

FIGURE 1: TRADITIONAL DIALECT VARIATION IN PLAUTDIETSCH



poses that as Mennonites formed new settlements, pronunciation changed to more advanced stages of the shift. In this respect, a group in Mexico may have the pronunciation of *heet* ‘hot’ as [hæt]/[hɔt] (subscripts 2 and 3), but their relatives in Canada who never moved into Mexico may pronounce the same word as [he:t] (subscript 1).

Using the Plautdietsch chain [e:] > [ɛ], Burns (2016b) estimates when some sound changes occurred in Mexico based on the lexical class membership of the Spanish loanword *peso* ‘Mexican currency’. Canadian [e:] as in *heet* ‘hot’ [he:t] shifted to [hæt]/[hɔt] in the Latin American daughter settlements along with Canadian [ɛ:], as in *ät* [ɛ:t] ‘I eat’, which became [ɛ:t] in Latin America. This means that Spanish [peso] could have been incorporated into the language as either a member of the HEET class, before the inherited Canadian system changed, or into the ÄT class, after the inherited system changed. Latin American communities descendant from

the Mexican community consistently say either [pæzo] or [pɔzo] for *peso* thereby grouping it with HEET instead of with ÄT. Today, ÄT has the closest pronunciation to Spanish [e] suggesting that *peso* was adopted at an earlier stage when HEET had the closest pronunciation to the Spanish vowel. The uniformity in the pronunciation of *peso* in communities descendant from Mexico suggests that these vowel changes were underway before the Mexican community began to fracture with new settlements in other parts of Latin America in the late 1950s (see § 3.1 for migration).

To summarize, previous research has identified different systems of variation in Plautdietsch which are linked to physical Mennonite settlements. While the traditional dialect system is linked to Old World settlements, some variation in the vowel system has been linked to on-going changes in New World settlements.

## 2. SOCIAL COMPLEXITIES IN MENNONITE COMMUNITIES

In this section, I set forth the sociological complexities of “space” in Mennonite communities. § 2.1 defines “space” and spatial changes as a social reality, as opposed to a physical one. § 2.2 analyzes “religion” as a social reality, rather than a theological one. These social realities are important because language variation often occurs along lines of social commitment wherein speech functions as one of many outward symbols of in- or out- group status. Sociolinguistic studies have found that both space and religion can be consequential to speech variation, but there is not a consensus on what relationship, if any, other social categories have to religion. I propose that Mennonites have a unique relationship between these two social realities as they have merged into a single complex heritable social concept.

### 2.1 Language Variation in Physical and Social Space

Sociology literature, and more recently sociolinguistic literature (Johnstone 2010), emphasize that space can be a social reality in addition to a physical reality. In the social sense, “space” is an imagined sense of spatial contiguity rather than an actual physical presence in any given area. The phrase “You can take the girl out of Texas, but you can’t take Texas out of the girl” is emblematic of this distinction. In this phrase, leaving the physical location does not sever one’s ideological and cultural ties with the location, thereby maintaining social links in the ideological space.

Labov (1963) found that speech variation can be driven by commitment to social space. Martha’s Vineyard is an island off the Massachusetts coast which historically has a distinct dialect of English from the mainland. Differences in young islander’s English directly aligned with how they felt about the island vs. the mainland. Young people who believed that their futures were tied to the mainland spoke like mainlanders, but young people who believed that their futures were tied to the island and its traditional occupations exhibited a hyper-articulated island accent. While both groups of young people resided in the same physical space, their commitment to the space as a social entity directly aligned to their speech patterns.

Claims to space (physical and social) are dynamic and subject to change. As people within a shared physical or social space seek to make the space more exclusive and differentiate themselves, new language patterns may arise in a process known as *territorialization* (Higgins 2017). A classic example of territorialization is the development of Croatian and Serbian as distinct languages from the late 17<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Historically, these languages were the same, but due to religious and political differences, community members developed their own standards that were exclusive to people who shared their ideological positions (Browne 2003). National boundaries were eventually delimited along the same ideological lines and each social space’s standard became its country’s national language. The opposite process, *deterritorialization*, whereby a physical or social space becomes less exclusive, is also known to occur (Higgins 2017). This process can often be observed in migrant situations where some community members decide to abandon their heritage language in an attempt to access broader social opportunities available outside of their community.

### 2.2 Social Intersections: Religion and Space in Netherlandic Mennonite Culture

Language variation studies seldom investigate religion as a social category (notable exceptions being Gumperz and Wilson 1971; Milroy and Milroy 1985; Keiser 2001; Mallinson and Childs 2007; Chatterton 2008; Baker and Bowie 2010; Yaeger-Dror 2014; Germanos and Miller 2015; Rosen and Skriver 2015). Sociolinguists who study religion disagree as to whether social membership in a religious group is exclusively defined by individual choice (e.g., Yaeger-Dror 2014) or whether membership can be inherited (e.g., Germanos and Miller 2015). I take the view that inheritance vs. choice is a community specific property and among Mennonites, both provide access to religion.

Sociologically, religion provides adherents with (a) a *worldview* or intellectual framework for understanding the meaning of life, (b) an *ethos* or structured set of behaviors and attitudes to adopt when interacting with others, and (c) *religious symbols* which reinforce worldview and ethos (Geertz 1957; Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2004;

Roberts and Yamane 2016, 94-97). Religious symbols conventionalize connections between abstract concepts (like worldview and ethos) through representations in the real world (e.g., behaviors, emotions, places, and things) thereby reinforcing the abstract concepts as concrete experiences.

Throughout much of history and in many parts of the world today, individuals access the three properties listed above via inheritance, either from one's clan or broader society (Myers 1996; Kelly and Degraaf 1997; Sherkat 2003; Roberts and Yamane 2016, 103), although non-inherited properties also play a role in personal reception of religious views. Early 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists emphasized religious membership through conscious and voluntary commitment to the religious theology, but I take the position that today, status as a Mennonite can be conferred through inheritance regardless of one's membership status in a denomination. My conversations with community members from various regions revealed that many people do not assess "Mennonite" community membership on the basis of baptism status, membership in a congregation, or even church attendance. Rather, many focused on how people were raised to interact with the world (ethos) and transmission of cultural symbols (including religious symbols).

The shift to inherited Mennonite membership likely arose in part due to the social structures of early settlements and a religious ethos which promoted isolation from others who did not share the same belief system (Bender, et al. 1989; Werner 2016, 122). Traditional settlements often have a leadership structure that determines the spiritual direction of the entire community, thus binding each village to a particular denomination. Mennonite settlements in Ukraine designed all social structures around the church. Leadership established punishments for church truancy and implemented rules to disincentivize the development of such behavior (Arnold Neufeld-Fast, personal communication, 2019). In the traditional village system, voting on either civic or clerical matters was contingent on being a fully initiated male member of the church. In the traditional school system, the main learning objectives were to socialize children into the church and to prepare them to pass church initiation rites as young adults. The traditional villages enabled extensive structuring of an

individual's religious worldview and ethos prior to official entry into a congregation.

The structure of traditional Mennonite villages led to an *intersection*, or mutual fusion (Levon 2015), of social concepts related to religion and space. Among Mennonites, that means that if someone is affiliated with a particular space, they are also affiliated with a particular religion or denomination and if they are affiliated with a particular Mennonite denomination, they are affiliated with a particular space. Contemporary village systems have evidence of the social intersection. Residents of these communities often attribute differences in the lived experience between villages to religious differences. Some villages which I visited reported conflicts within a single congregation. In these conflicts, loyalties were often split along regional lines. Even though the traditional village system gave rise to the intersection, dissolving the traditional village system does not entail severing the intersection. Some consultants reported having their faith experience dismissed because they were not perceived to live in "God's land". In this case, the dismissive individuals came from a region lacking a traditional village system as did the person who was dismissed. Regardless of whether or not communities maintain the structures which gave rise to the intersection between religion and space, many individuals still recognize the historical social connection.

The intersection between space and religion entails that when one inherits social membership associated with a particular denomination, they also inherit membership into a social space and vice versa. In some Mennonite communities, the inheritance-based structure of social spatial-religious access and the ethos promoting isolation from non-believers has reinforced a broader inheritance-based view of membership that includes ethnicity. Some scholars classify Mennonites as an ethno-religious group (Loewen 2001; Cañas-Bottos 2008; Rempel-Smucker 2015; Fisher 2017) wherein access to religion and religious structures are only available via inheritance in a closed ethnic group. Tina Siemens (personal communication, 2018), a Mennonite historian descendant from the conservative Mexican Chortitza community, grew up believing that "Mennonite" was simultaneously a race as well as religion. This view is not unique; I frequently interact with individuals who

comment that they are “pure Mennonite” when referencing DNA.

Some church leaders in Canada suggested acknowledging the existence of two distinct meanings of the word “Mennonite” in the wake of a new national Mennonite Heritage week. They proposed drawing a clear distinction between “Mennonite” used to reference the theology of a multicultural religious group and “Mennonite” used to reference an inherited in-group identity (Longhurst 2019).

### 3. NON-LINGUISTIC SYMBOLS OF RELIGION AND SPACE

In this section, I present two Mennonite spatial-religious symbols: community movement and lifestyle. Identification of other spatial-religious symbols is important because language variation often co-occurs with other symbols of in- vs. out-group status such as clothing or hairstyles (cf., Eckert’s 1988 study on jocks and burnouts, Mallinson and Child’s 2007 study on church ladies and porch sitters). If language variation is connected to religion, it will serve not only as an outward symbol of group membership, but also as a religious symbol that reinforces ethos and worldview of the religious group. The presentation of symbols in this section is centered on the research sites visited for this study: California, Campeche, Kansas, and Texas. While some readers may be familiar with these symbols, I take the time to establish both as they are important background for understanding the three types of space investigated in § 4 and 5.

#### 3.1 Spatial Transition as a Religious Symbol

The Mennonite migration path is one of the most recognizable symbols of inherited spatial-religious membership throughout the community. Migrations are often preceded by a religious conflict which motivates a community to seek religious freedom. Religious elders historically sought land for their congregation and were tasked with leading the congregation through hardship to religious freedom in the form of a new settlement. As discussed in § 2.2, traditional villages are highly localized in terms of religious practice and socialization.

The earliest Mennonite migrations were motivated by external political pressure to abandon the religion, thus making migration the means through which religious freedom could be attained. Due to external political pressure, Flemish Mennonites joined the Frisian Mennonites eventually leading to a schism in the 1560s (Dyck 1993, 123; Zjip and Brüsewitz 2011; Werner 2016). In the 1530-80s, political pressure motivated Mennonites from the Netherlands to enter the Vistula Delta in Poland. In 1772, political turmoil in Poland resulted in turbulence for Mennonites motivating them to move east again. They secured land in Ukraine and in 1788, poor Flemish Mennonites from Poland settled in the Chortitza region of Ukraine, followed by richer Frisian Mennonites who settled along the Molotschna River in 1802. The legacy of these two settlements is still recognized in many Mennonite communities today in church names and in the names of the two traditional dialects (see § 1.1).

In the events leading up to WWI, German (and by extension Dutch) groups lost favor with the Russian government, which controlled Ukraine at the time. This led to a large wave of Mennonite migration to North America in 1874. Mennonites predominantly from the Molotschna background migrated to the central United States while Mennonites predominantly from the Chortitza background migrated to central Canada. In a handwritten sermon, “A sermon about our travel to America”, Elder Johann Wiebe of Rosenort opens with a passage from Genesis (First Book of Moses) 12:1. In this passage, God commands Abraham and his family to move to a new land with the promise of blessings when they arrive at the destination. In this respect, trusting in God’s promise of abundant blessings is an act of faith as is the travel to the location where blessings will be bestowed.

Mennonites who did not leave Ukraine in the 1870s faced many hardships (Nieuweboer 1998). They had difficulty leaving Ukraine and were either killed or forcibly moved to Siberia or Kazakhstan and left to die. Many were forced to hide their religion by the communist government which came to power. In 1929, some Mennonites were granted permission to leave and settled in Germany, Canada, Brazil, and Paraguay. Another opportunity to leave Ukraine came in 1943 when German forces arrived. Many Mennonites were

captured and forcibly repatriated by the Red Army (Krahn and Sawatzky 2011).

Within the United States, Molotschna descendants founded several universities, thus strengthening their links with non-Mennonites. In contrast, some Canadian Chortitza descendants resisted reforming their education system fearing it would strengthen their ties with outsiders. Angered by provincial government attempts to standardize education in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fretz 1945, 10; Oreopoulos 2005; Regehr and Thiessen 2011), they formed the first Latin American Mennonite settlements in 1922 in Chihuahua, Mexico. The conservative leadership declared all remaining Mennonites in Canada to be out of communion with their church (Sawatzky 1971, 48) and reportedly confiscated their congregation's Canadian passports to prevent their return to Canada. Eventually, more moderate Canadian Molotschna arrived in Mexico, and founded the Jagüeyes Colonies. Mennonites who entered Mexico in subsequent migrations often retained their Canadian citizenship, which allows their descendants to travel back and forth regularly.

The religious reform practice known as *Kjoakjebaun* 'church ban' is another type of religious trial, which sometimes is associated with space and spatial transition (Cañas-Bottos 2008, 221).<sup>3</sup> Conservative groups which practice banning socially isolate individuals who violate unwritten social codes. A banned individual (or their entire family), can only engage in normal social life once the clergy determine it is appropriate. While banned, individuals cannot move because most moves require a letter of recommendation from the clergy. As was mentioned in the previous paragraph, the initial move to Mexico involved banning an entire region that failed to partake in the religious trial of moving to a new region. Within Mexico, bans are often circumvented by converting to a less conservative denomination, which has made the practice difficult to maintain (Quiring 2004). Conservatives often have to physically move and isolate themselves from moderates in order to maintain banning as a conflict

resolution strategy thus reinforcing the connection between spatial transition and religious trials.

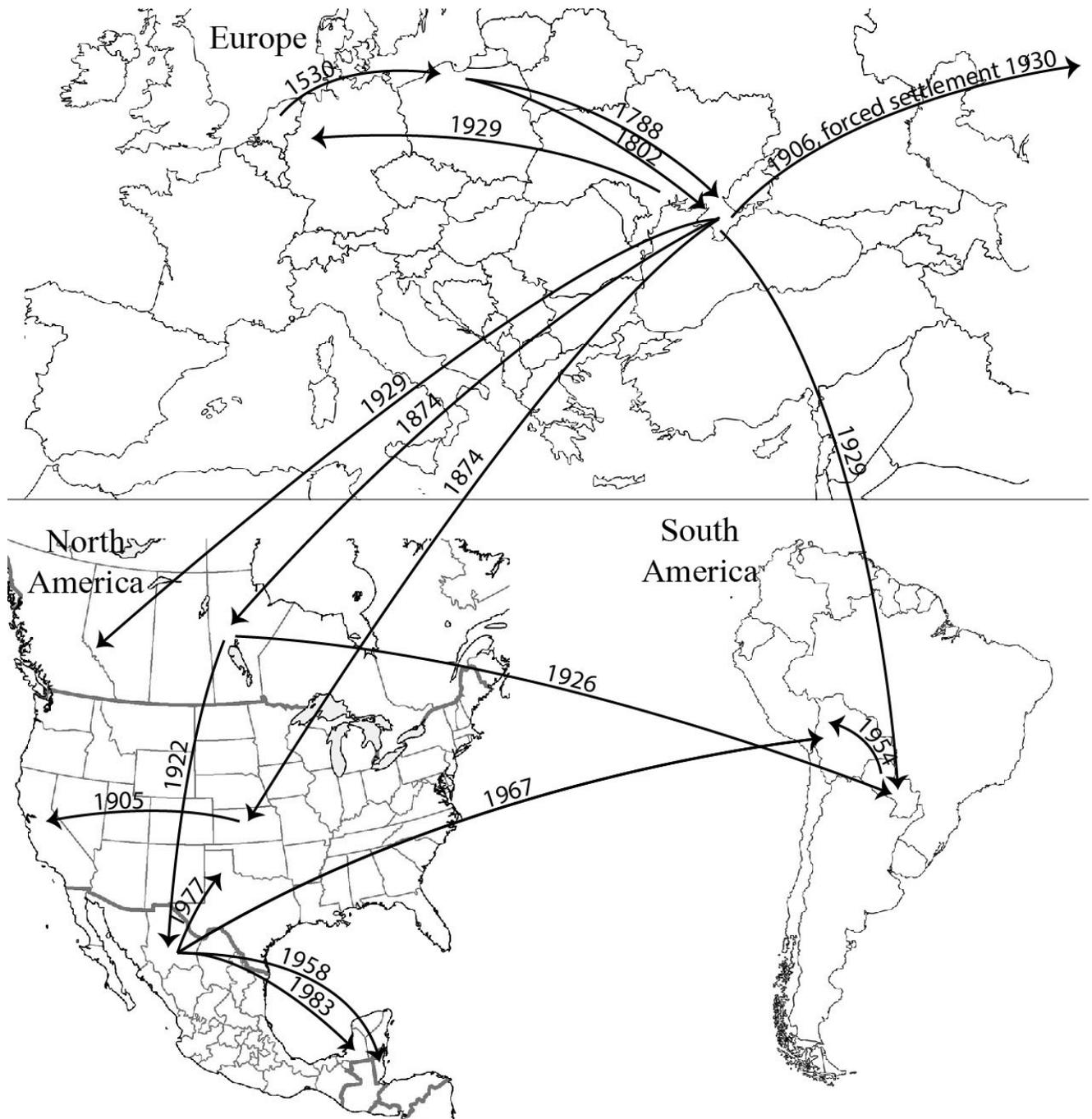
Among the Mexican community, migrations often involve failed attempts to resolve group-internal conflicts which result in schisms. During the 1950s, northern Mexican Mennonites disputed over the use of rubber tires. The clergy mandated metal tractor tires, but they were expensive, difficult to maintain, and highly ineffective when drought affected the region from 1951-1954 (Fretz and Sawatzky 2010). Some farmers switched to rubber tires and were reportedly caught riding their tractors into town and mingling with non-Mennonites. The ensuing dispute resulted in the founding of colonies in Belize in 1958 in order to evade banning, but not all moderates made the move. In 1967, Mennonites from northern Mexico moved to Bolivia in search of a more conservative environment (Lanning 1971) and for some the Rubber Tire Uprising was a consideration for the move (Siemens, personal communication, 2018). A decade later, in 1977, Mexican Mennonites, including Siemen's family, moved north into the United States. In this region, the traditional village system broke down (Elbow and Gordon 1981, 14-15) forcing many Mennonites into non-Mennonite social spaces. Mennonites in Texas eventually moved north into Oklahoma and western Kansas.

After the social difficulties of the 1970s, conservatives in northern Mexico began to buckle under pressure to reform. In the 1980s, Old Colony Mennonites who did not want to reform settled in Campeche, Mexico. They were soon followed by less conservative denominations, but presently conservatives from the Old Colony background greatly outnumber all other denominations present in the region. Figure 2 summarizes the migrations in a map. Initial settlement years are included, but the date does not preclude subsequent migration to the same region. Migrations of short distances (e.g., Texas to Kansas) are excluded for space considerations.

Several spatial patterns stand out. Eastward migration occurred until settlement in Ukraine after which Mennonites entered the New World in 1874. Migration in the Americas generally headed south. Currently, a northward migration called the *Rückwanderung* 'backwards migration' is underway in which Latin American Mennonites return to older New World settlements (Sawatzky 1971, 318). Timing is also important as 1874 and

<sup>3</sup> This article uses the term "ban" instead of "shun" because of the association of a similar, but different practice called "shunning" by the Amish. A similar term "excommunication" is not used because of its association with a similar but different practice in the Catholic Church.

FIGURE 2: MENNONITE MIGRATION MAP



1929 see sharp cleavages in the unity of Ukrainian Mennonite settlements. In Mexico, timing is important over a span of several decades. After the Rubber Tire Uprising in the 1950s, the northern Mexican communities hemorrhaged membership about every ten years over four decades due to internal conflicts.

Today, different populations have different levels of connectivity. Central Kansas, California, Nebraska, and Oklahoma often maintain ties, while Mexico, Texas, Canada, Belize, western Kansas, and Bolivia often maintain ties. Some cross-over between the groups occurs, but people report that it is very low. Some Mexican Mennonites entered

the United States through California in the 1970s, but eventually resettled with the Texan community. Some California Molotschna reported interacting with the Mexican Mennonite population, but the contact between these two groups was so brief that the California Molotschna were unaware that the Mexican Mennonites joined the group in Texas. In one case, a state agency connected some individuals in western Kansas with the original central Kansas settlement, but the extent of their contact is low and only on behalf of the state agency, according to individuals from both locations. Some South American Mennonites come to California for an education at Fresno Pacific University, but they only stay for their degree and do not speak Plautdietsch as a general means of communication in the region.

### 3.2 Lifestyle Religious Symbols

While the act of migrating and settling is religiously symbolic within the Mennonite community, one's lifestyle is also religiously symbolic. This type of symbolism also has an interface with spatial social groups because those with a conservative ethos often employ outward symbols that purposefully make them distinct from others. Here, I define *conservatism* as a worldview and ethos that fosters isolation from other denominations and religions. Historically, the most conservative groups tend to be from the Chortitza background and the least conservative groups tend to be from the Molotschna background.

Many denominations are present across the surveyed regions (California, Campeche, Kansas, and Texas), but for the sake of brevity, only those relevant to the current survey will be discussed. Texas is home to many denominations which are also found throughout Mexico, and western Kansas shares a subset of these denominations. Some of the denominations in central Kansas are also found in California.

Today, the most conservative communities are the Old Colony and Reinland which are historically Chortitza. These denominations actively regulate many aspects of interactions with outsiders and in many cases openly discourage social interactions with people who are not conservative Mennonites unless it is for business purposes. In Mexico, members must reside in denomination-specific settlements which are secluded and

physically separate from indigenous, mestizo, and other Mennonite settlements. In the United States, members of these congregations often cluster together in the same part of town.

Clothing is an important religious symbol among conservative Anabaptists (Scott 1997, 30-31, 70-73). Conservative Mennonites wear clothing that distinguishes them from other populations and styles can change as schisms develop. Siemens recalls that white clothing from Canada was intentionally destroyed in Mexico because the color represented a lifestyle from a different region deemed to be too worldly (personal communication, 2019).

Conservative denominations often restrict education. Bible study is prohibited in order to enforce community cohesion through the elders' interpretation of the Bible and to limit the influence of proselytizers. In Mexico, conservative denominations discourage women from learning Spanish with a few exceptions. Old Colony members openly comment that if a girl learns Spanish, she will run away with a Spanish-speaking man. This is perceived as a threat in a community where access to religion is inherited in a closed ethnic group (see § 2.2). In the United States, women learn English because they live in town, but can still encounter pressure to marry within the community.

Conservatives often restrict technology (e.g., credit cards, cell phones, tape recorders, computers, most vehicles with engines, and the location of rubber tires on a vehicle). In regions with a functional village system, driving is often prohibited as is the use of electricity from the main power grid that other populations use. Finally, conservative denominations use banning (as described in § 3.1) as a means of maintaining control when social conventions are broken.

The Sommerfeld is a Chortitza denomination which is less conservative than the Old Colony and Reinland (what I call "moderate Chortitza"). In southern Mexico, the Sommerfeld promote isolation from non-Mennonites, live in physically separate spaces, and practice banning. Although they do not restrict technology, they still strongly discourage all non-business interactions with outsiders. Women have specific fashion choices which distinguish them from other populations in the region, but men wear clothing that is often found in non-Mennonite groups. The Canadian

Sommerfeld is a more liberal Sommerfeld group active in Texas. They encourage stewardship with non-Mennonites and do not discourage members from interacting with outsiders. The Texan Canadian Sommerfeld actively recruit new members from the Old Colony and Reinland by offering to be a gateway out of the conservative lifestyle.

Moderate churches often encourage engagement with non-Mennonites. Molotschna denominations, like the Klein Gemeinde and Alexanderwohl Church, are often moderate. Many moderate Chortitza congregations come from a string of schisms that trace back to the Sommerfeld including the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) and Gospel Mennonite Church (GMC). While the Klein Gemeinde's practices are historically Molotschna, many of the southern Mexican members are defectors from the Old Colony (Chortitza). The first southern Mexican Klein Gemeinde village developed after members of the largest Old Colony village revolted against the clergy. The Old Colony elders asserted their authority by banning the leaders of the rebellion. In spite of a tense relationship, some of the original revolt leaders ignore the ban, still use outward symbols of the Old Colony (e.g., clothing), and offer social services to the Old Colony (which the Old Colony leadership accepts).

The southern Mexican Klein Gemeinde and EMMC have villages, but congregation members are not required to live there or send their children to the village school. The village schools are structured to give children access to the outside world (e.g., learning Spanish regardless of gender) while also maintaining community relations inside the village (e.g., a faith-based curriculum and learning High German). In some cases, non-Mennonites live in these villages. One moderate village official asserted that non-Mennonites could attend the Mennonite school if they would be willing to pay the tuition and learn High German.

The Alexanderwohl, Mennonite Bretheren, and General Conference Mennonites are all moderate Molotschna denominations in central Kansas. These groups lack a Mennonite specific dress, housing structures, and primary education system. Community members report intentionally seeking to repair conflicts between denominations and signal making amends through adopting each other's customs. Members also report adopting behaviors which make their services less distinguish-

able from most other Protestant denominations in the immediate region. Finally, the active pursuit of higher education in these groups has strengthened their connections with non-Mennonites.

#### 4. THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE AS A SYMBOL

The previous sections have outlined the proposed regional variants of Plautdietsch (§ 1) and have highlighted the complex relationship between social space and religion (§ 2). While it is the case that examples of outward symbols reflecting the relationship between space and religion can be found in Mennonite history and contemporary living practices (§ 3), there is the question as to whether or not this relationship extends to language. The clearest indicator that language does function as a religious symbol is the use of High German by the Plautdietsch-speaking community. High German was first adopted by the community in Poland (Epp 1993) and continues to be used as a liturgical and educational language in the communities that still practice the traditional village system. It has been noted that within Mexican communities, the variety of High German has a Plautdietsch accent (Redekop 1969). In these communities, the pronunciation of High German itself is reported to be religiously symbolic with High German [a] pronounced as [au]/[o:] in conservative communities (Cox 2013, 56; Burns 2016a,10). Although High German is not the focus of the data collected for this project, the attitudes towards High German pronunciation did come up during elicitation sessions and are important to understanding the behavior expressed in Plautdietsch. For this reason, I will reference High German when discussing the Plautdietsch findings.

Studying the symbolism of Plautdietsch itself is more difficult because speakers often view the language as a debased form of High German which is unworthy of attention. 49 speakers from different regions agreed to participate in this study (United States = 15, Canada =3, Mexico = 26, Bolivia = 2, Belize = 2, and Germany =1) and an additional Canadian speaker, Herman Rempel (1915-2008), was added from a corpus of pre-recorded data (Derksen 2013). It is not known when Rempel made the recordings, but they were made some time after the release of the second edition

of his dictionary in 1995. For the list of all 50 speakers see the appendix.

Data were collected at four field sites (California, Campeche, Kansas, and Texas) from a word list designed to elicit traditional dialect variation and all major vowel categories of Plautdietsch. The vowel classes were built as in Burns (2016a) by verifying lexical class membership across 12 sources (Quiring 1928; Lehn 1957; Baerg 1960; Jedig 1966; Moelleken 1966; Goerzen 1970; Thiessen 1977; Moelleken 1987; Brandt 1992; Rempel 1995; Nieuweboer 1998; Zacharias 2009). Traditional dialect features were based on Quiring (1928), Thiessen (1977), Tolksdorf (1985), Epp (1993), Rempel (1995), and Neufeld (2000). All words were recorded on a digital recorder (Zoom H4n, Nady Hm-20U microphone, sample rate= 44.1 kHz).

Two word lists were used. The first list contained 119 words and was used from June 2012–January 2014. The second list was a modification of the first list and contained 131 words. The second list removed words which were not commonly known, added more items from low frequency lexical classes, and added more traditional dialect words. The statistical method employed for this study did not detect groups of speakers specific to the elicitation tool. During the elicitation session, speakers were given a translation task or a picture naming task.<sup>4</sup> While the translation task could introduce influences from the source language, this confound would be present regardless of the translation or picture naming task because all consent documents were requested in a language other than Plautdietsch. This is because Plautdietsch lacks a standardized orthographic system and is not taught as a language of instruction in the various school systems that participants went through.

Speakers were free to skip words that they did not know. This resulted in some speakers producing a subset of the targeted word classes. Participants always had access to a written list of target words in Rempel's (1995) orthography because they did

not like the thought of an elicitation task without knowing the answer. Because Plautdietsch is not standardized, the written list did not influence the responses and most speakers ignored the orthography entirely. In some cases, speakers would provide responses that did not resemble the written answer, other times they did not look at the paper at all, and in one case a consultant frequently offered his corrections to the orthography using his pronunciation as the baseline for "correct speech."

The social questionnaire requested information related to gender, age, locations identified with (present and historical), any known Plautdietsch variation (and who produces the variation), and the speaker's self-identified variant of Plautdietsch (which mostly matched their historical Chortitza and Molotschna association). Due to the wide variety of denominations encountered across all regions, the researcher noted if a speaker was a member of a conservative or moderate denomination and whether the denomination has a Chortitza background or a Molotschna background. This information was usually discussed during the survey, subsequently outside of the elicitation session, and in some cases the consultants invited the researcher to a church service. Some participants were no longer practicing Mennonites even though they were raised in communities with Mennonite specific world views.

In many parts of Mexico, speakers do not know their historical location/church affiliation.<sup>5</sup> This information was filled in by the researcher based on what is known about an individual's family migration history. Much of this information has been preserved in groups which entered the United States, or in Canadian groups that never fully moved into Mexico.

The researcher made an informed decision to primarily focus on contrastive social space instead of the degree of religious devotion. In some regions, Mennonites have become the targets of

<sup>4</sup> The picture naming task was used because many women who participated were Plautdietsch dominant and did not prefer the translation task. Some of them mentioned that they knew of interested parties who were illiterate and would feel embarrassed if presented with a written word list. Illiteracy is mostly driven by exclusive use of High German in school systems and limited access to High German in other contexts.

<sup>5</sup> Daughter settlements of the two original Ukrainian groups are often described as either "Chortitza" or "Molotschna" depending on where the majority of the original settlers came from. The nomenclature is somewhat misleading because it does not preclude the presence of Mennonites of the other background. In spite of the religious and cultural differences between Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonites, inhabitants of these colonies developed multiple mixed-background daughter colonies in Ukraine and Russia (e.g., Kuban and Naumenko).

an intense proselytization campaign by Jehovah’s Witnesses. Independent of any given researcher’s intentions, these types of campaigns lead to the development of a general distrust of outsiders seeking information from Mennonites. There is also a belief in these regions that if someone should know the answer to a question, God will grant the individual access to the answer. In these regions, the researcher often waited for discussion of religion to be prompted by the consultant rather than initiating these discussions. There is also a common belief in these regions that language is completely divorced from the individual that uses the language, so social questions can seem out of place when discussing language in a way that the consultant hasn’t previously considered. Based on these considerations, if a consultant appeared uncomfortable with providing social information, the researcher filled in the sheet based on what consultants had freely offered as information in public settings.

All recordings were annotated in Praat for vowel class. Formant values were estimated using the Berkeley Phonetics Machine and cross-checked by hand (N=6,001).<sup>6</sup> All monophthong classes were measured at the midpoint and all diphthong classes were measured at the first and third quarters to avoid measuring consonant transitions.<sup>7</sup> Vowels were normalized across speakers using Lavbovian normalization (Labov, et al. 2006, 39-40) following from the findings from Adank, et al. (2004), Clopper, et al. (2005), Clopper (2009), Fabricius, et al. (2009), and Flynn (2011). The average hertz value and the standard deviation of each vowel class were included in the statistical model.

Only traditional dialect features with a categorical two-way distinction were coded (N=1,345). These include the syllabic nasal (which is always –n or –ŋ), the BLEIW ‘blue’ class (which is always front or back), and the the DOAG ‘days’ class (which is always front or back). The frontness in HÜT ‘skin’ class is excluded because consultants produced varying degrees of frontness that exceeded the

two-way Chortitza vs Molotschna divide.<sup>8</sup> Each participant received a traditional dialect feature score based on the percentage of Chortitza tokens used per feature. A score of 0 indicates exclusive use of Molotschna forms whereas a score of 100 indicates exclusive use of Chortitza forms. Unlike previous approaches to Plautdietsch dialectology, this method acknowledges that some speakers may use a mix of traditional dialect forms either within or across features.

This study used hierarchical clustering as a statistical method because the sample was skewed. Older speakers tended to be from the United States, whereas younger speakers tended to be from Latin America. This is an unavoidable reality about the sampled population: Plautdietsch is moribund in the original U.S. and Canadian settlements, therefore most speakers are older in these regions. Plautdietsch is still actively transmitted in Latin America, but older generations are more conservative than younger generations and many do not trust unfamiliar technology. Hierarchical clustering can deal with the imbalanced sample through a statistical resampling method called *bootstrapping* (Baayen 2008, 146-48, Levshina 2015, 315-317, Plonsky, et al. 2015, 592-93).

Hierarchical clustering identifies groups of speakers with similar pronunciations (i.e. similar hertz values for vowels and similar Chortitza index scores for traditional dialect features). Rather than providing a p-value for each detected group, this method provides a confidence interval which by default is set at 80%. After groups with an 80% or higher confidence interval are detected, it is the researcher’s job to identify which social information is relevant. Given that this study investigates contrastive notions of “space,” I report pronunciation group membership based on three spatial types: physical space (where someone resides), New World social space (their historical regional affiliation in North America), and Old World social space (their historical regional affiliation in the Ukrainian settlements). I treat all types of spaces as binary values whose baseline is set to the largest group in the Campeche field site: Latin American Chortitza from southern Mexico.

<sup>6</sup>The Berkeley Phonetics Machine estimates formant values by means of a Python script based on Ueda, et al.’s (2007) Inverse Filter Control formant tracking.

<sup>7</sup>Bussmann (2004) provides evidence that the nucleus represents the most concise target of the diphthong gesture in Frisian (West Germanic).

<sup>8</sup>The realization of the palatal plosive is excluded because at the time of this study, there were no preexisting studies on how to measure this feature (see Burns 2020 for an analysis of this feature).

Speakers were assigned to physical space groups (southern Mexican vs non-southern Mexican) based on where they physically resided (permanently or part-time) at the time of the study. This type of spatial assignment reflects a traditional dialect studies sense of variation in space which would seek to place variation among residents of a particular location. Assignment to New World (Latin American vs. non-Latin American) and Old World (Chortitza vs. non-Chortitza) social spaces depended on whether they were raised in the baseline group or whether they willingly became a member of the baseline group at a later age. These types of spaces reflect a social Mennonite-specific sense of space wherein one does not need to physically reside somewhere to be a member of the social group connected to that location. In this sense, members of the *Rückwanderung* are Canadian, but they are coded as Latin American because they inherited the Latin American affiliation.

## 5. RESULTS

This section presents the linguistic survey results and discussion of the findings.<sup>9</sup> § 5.1 presents the contrastive social membership of the statistically detected pronunciation groups. Again, there are three types of spatial membership: physical space, New World social space, and Old World social space. The spatial concept with the most extreme polarity across pronunciation groups is taken to be the social group which best explains the observed variation.

§ 5.2 discusses why some physical locations exhibit novel linguistic patterns. Based on interactions with consultants and conversations with community historians, I propose social scenarios of how language has been historically used to define spatial-religious group membership.

### 5.1 Spatial Variation Results

Hierarchical clustering can only compare categories produced across all participants. Not every participant produced all dialect tokens and not every participant produced all vowel classes. For this reason, this section presents clustering data in three categories: traditional dialect features

across individuals who produced all three traditional classes, vowel classes represented across all participants (representing only a subset of vowel classes in the clusters), and the complete set of vowel classes among the subset of individuals who produced the full set.

The clustering method identified two traditional dialect feature groups. This finding is consistent with the near-universal two-way split that consultants made in the surveyed regions. Figure 3 shows pronunciation group membership according to the different types of space. People affiliated with a spatial group are shown in light grey, whereas those unaffiliated with the group are shown in dark grey.

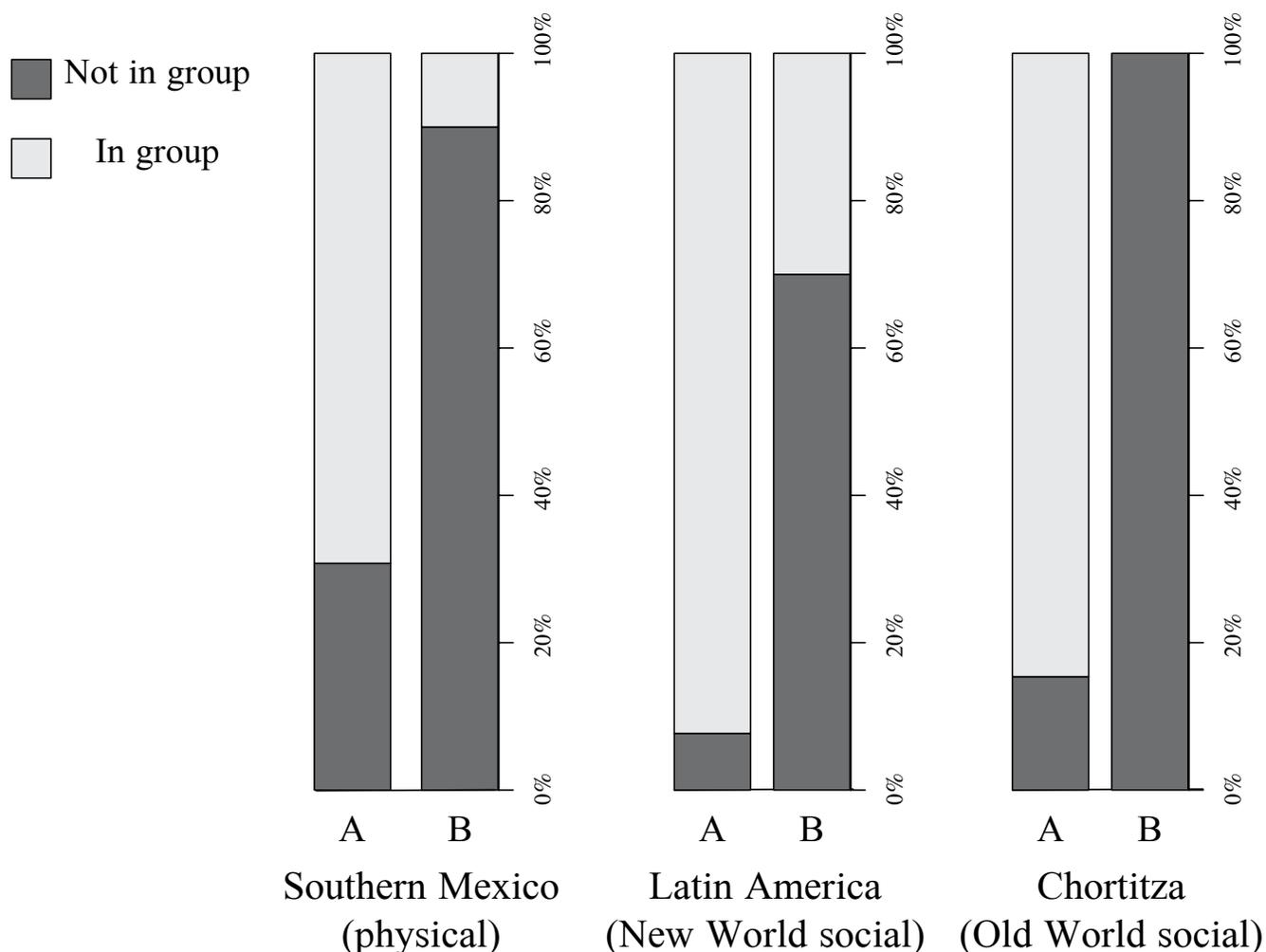
In Figure 3, the worst predictor of variation is physical space, and the best predictor is Old World social space (effectively Chortitza vs Molotschna). Group A is the closest to the traditional Chortitza group, whereas Group B is closest to the traditional Molotschna group (see § 1.1). This result indicates that the traditional Chortitza vs. Molotschna difference mostly aligns to the individuals who inherited membership in these social spaces.

The Molotschna individuals grouped into the Chortitza dialect cluster are both associated with Latin America: HPC04 and SF15. HPC04 used exclusively Chortitza features but notably, she moved to Mexico from another country and had to learn how to talk like locals, the majority of whom use exclusively Chortitza features. SF15, on the other hand is from Mexico and at the time of the study lived in a community that was constantly taking in new converts of the Chortitza background. She avoided the syllabic nasal (final -n), as did some of her relatives. Other Latin American Molotschna from the Klein Gemeinde background, HPC03, TX10, and TX11, pattern with the Molotschna from the original U.S. settlements. Within the Molotschna group, there are minor differences because some speakers use Chortitza features (e.g. a front vowel instead of a back vowel for BLEIW ‘blue’).

As mentioned above, the results for vowels are divided into two groups: results across all speakers (which includes a subset of vowels) and results across the entire set of sampled vowels (which were only produced by a subset of speakers). For the former, the clustering method identified four pronunciation groups which are presented in Figure 4. One speaker included in the analysis was

<sup>9</sup> All data reported in this section and in the appendix are consistent with the IRB approval granted for this project.

**FIGURE 3: TRADITIONAL DIALECT GROUPS  
(HIERARCHICAL CLUSTER GROUP A N=14, GROUP B N=10)**



not grouped into a cluster by the algorithm and therefore is not represented in Figure 4.

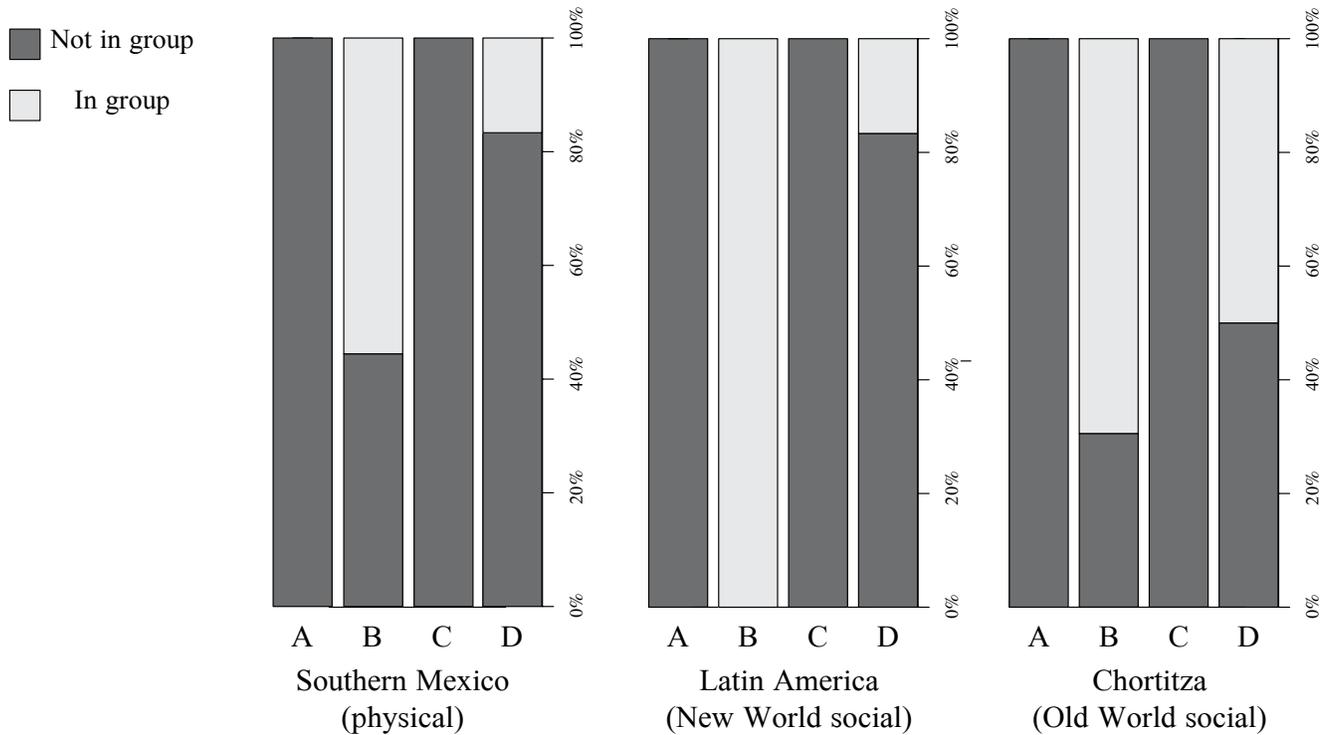
Like Figure 3, physical location is a poor predictor of variation, but unlike Figure 3, the best predictor is New World social space. Groups A, C, and most of D are populated by non-Latin American consultants (U.S. and Canadian), whereas Group B is exclusively Latin American (including Canadian Rückwanderung and Canadians who permanently moved to Mexico).

Canadians whose families did not move into Latin America are both in Group D along with several Americans and one individual from Latin America. The Latin American is an older male from Mexico, SF07. As mentioned in § 1.1, Burns (2016a) claims that older settlements along the

Mennonite migration path have a historically conservative pronunciation of vowels. As with most linguistic changes in-progress, older people can sometimes exhibit more conservative speech patterns that were widespread in the population at an earlier time. This suggests that SF07 may just be a conservative speaker who shows the link between the Latin American group’s speech patterns and the Canadian group.

Group D is important because it shows that differences in vowel pronunciation are not due to the age imbalance in the sample. Both Canadians whose families never moved into Latin America are in this group; MT01 is a younger Canadian male while Herman Rempel is an older Canadian male. Latin American speakers of comparable

**FIGURE 4: VOWEL GROUPS ACROSS ALL SPEAKERS  
(HIERARCHICAL CLUSTER GROUP A N=4, GROUP B N=37, GROUP C N=2, GROUP D N=6)**



age to MT01 are in Group B. Most older Latin American speakers with a comparable age to SF07 and Herman Rempel are in Group B as well.

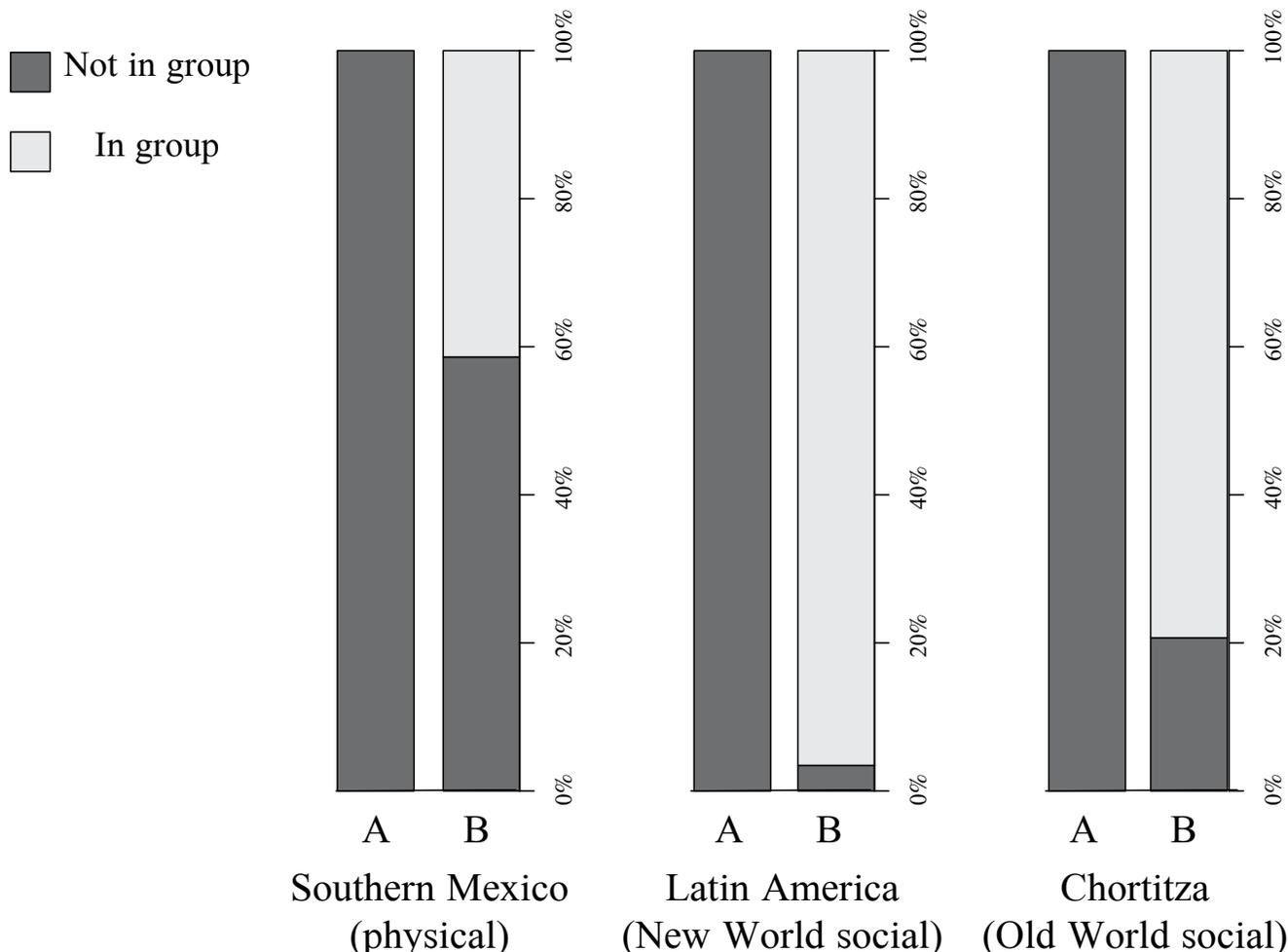
When we look at the complete set of vowel classes, which were produced by only a subset of participants, the clustering method identified two pronunciation groups. These groups are presented in Figure 5.

As with Figure 4, physical location is a poor predictor of variation and New World social space is the best spatial predictor. Those who are not affiliated with Latin America tend to be in Group A, whereas those who are affiliated with Latin America are in Group B. The one person who is not of Latin American background in Group B is Herman Rempel. Because the Latin American group historically is derived from the Canadian group, Herman Rempel's classification with the Latin American group, as opposed to being grouped with U.S. speakers, provides support for the relationship between the Latin American vowel system and the ancestral Canadian vowel system.

## 5.2 DISCUSSION: THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEMBERSHIP IN PHYSICAL SPACE

The results from § 5.1 show that while physical spaces do exhibit variation, they are not the best spatial predictor of variation. The reader might have noticed that even though one social space often performed better than the other, both social spaces appeared to have much better predictive capabilities than physical space. This leads us to the question: how is language use in a physical space influenced by membership in different social spaces? To begin answering this question, we should first note a basic fact about the figures in § 5.1: all visualizations of social space were one-dimensional and did not fully incorporate the spatial-religious interface in the Mennonite community (see §§ 2 and 3). The interface is important to understanding how forms spread within and across physical spaces. Much of the spread comes back to the concept of building and deconstructing

**FIGURE 5: VOWEL GROUPS ACROSS SPEAKERS WHO PRODUCED ALL VOWELS  
(HIERARCHICAL CLUSTER GROUP A N=6, GROUP B N=29)**



ideological spaces combined with physical population movements.

In the traditional dialect system, the clustering method identified one macro-Chortitza group (Group A shown in Figure 2) and two sub-groups; those who used exclusively Chortitza features, and those who used a mix of Chortitza and Molotschna features. Although not all speakers were aware of the Chortitza vs. Molotschna distinction by name, all participants made a binary-split in speech patterns based on the use of the syllabic nasal (final *-n*). This cross-regional reference to the final *-n* suggests that the form has a long history of territorialization and remains territorialized even among Chortitza speakers who have adopted the use of final *-ə*, such as the Sommerfelder of southern Mexico. HPC01, who comes from the

Sommerfeld, reported that final *-n* is used exclusively by the Old Colony while *-ə* is used by everyone else.

Access to social-religious space was directly implicated by some of the individuals who have restructured their speech patterns to match the social territorialization of the final *-n*. SF04 and SF06 are siblings whose parents had a very public theological break with the Old Colony leadership of their region. Although SF04 did not produce all of the dialect tokens during the elicitation session, and therefore is not included in Figure 3, he vividly remembers the break and its aftermath including banning. In our conversations outside of elicitation, SF04 avoided the syllabic nasal, the feature directly associated with the conservative Chortitza groups which banned his family. His much young-

er sibling, SF06, did not report memories of the split and uses exclusively Chortitza features in her speech. Another defector from the most conservative Chortitza group, ES01 (not included in Figure 3 for the same reason as SF04), reported becoming aware of switching back and forth between final  $-n$  and  $-\text{ə}$  only after his family stopped attending the Chortitza group's church and moved out of their village into a moderate congregation's village. Speakers like SF04 and ES01, both of whom had traumatic experiences leaving the Old Colony, have begun to shift away from the use of the most notable Old Colony speech feature in the region. Both men are aware that this shift directly maps to when they stopped attending the churches and left the villages. There are other individuals in the region who are also aware of developing variable use of final  $-n$  only after leaving the Old Colony. The association of  $-\text{ə}$  with less conservative social spaces would also explain the use of  $-\text{ə}$  by HPC01 and other Sommerfelder who are of a moderate Chortitza background. The Sommerfeld, while similar to the Old Colony in some respects, do not want to be confused with the highly conservative Old Colony.

While the syllabic nasal has retained its territorial status in southern Mexico, the vowels of the traditional dialect system have been undergoing deterritorialization. When asked, people were less aware of variation in words like *Doag* 'days' and *bliew* 'blue'. Even though variation in *Doag* does exist in southern Mexico, many people use the Chortitza variant of this form. When asked about traditional Molotschna [au] and [ɔ:] pronunciations of words in the BLEIW class, Molotschna residents of southern Mexico reported that words pronounced this way are all High German. This is historically not the case (as outlined in § 1.1) and some lexical items in this class, such as *Mau* 'sleeve', do not exist in the type of High German used in the community (cf. East Frisian Low German *Mau* and Dutch *Mouw* but Standard German *Ärmel*).

The spread of traditional dialect forms across a physical region can come from (a) conversion to a different religion or (b) relocation to a new region. As mentioned above, defecting from a congregation can bring forms from one religious group to another. Territorialized forms, like the final  $-n$ , may face resistance in a new community, but deterritorialized forms, like BLEIW

will meet less resistance and are more likely to become regional variants. The Latin American Rückwanderung group, which moved into previously settled parts of Canada, maintains social networks heavily favoring connections with other people of a Latin American background (Sawatsky 1971, 318; Kampen-Robinson 2017). As a result, Rückwanderung speakers fail to encounter competition from linguistic forms that were more common in the older settlement. This allows for the maintenance of both Latin American social groups and speech patterns in Canada. When speakers from Canada and Germany move into Mexico and the southern United States, which is physically dominated by a large Latin American Chortitza presence, they adopt the majority's speech patterns in an attempt to fit in (as reported by people who made the move). This leads to the spread of Chortitza features as they are frequently the majority in these Latin American derived settlements.

The results in § 5.1 found that Plautdietsch vowel variation is mostly predicted by one's affiliation with Latin American social spaces and that the Canadian vowel system is linked historically to the Latin American one. This is an expected property given that the surveyed Latin American population is primarily descendant from the Canadian population as outlined in § 3.1. In the vowel shift, the pronunciation of words like [hɛ:t] 'hot', [ho:z] 'rabbit', and [taus] 'cup' shift to the realization [həit]/[hɔit], [hu:z], and [to:s]. The former set of pronunciations are common in older North American settlements (Groups A, C, and some of D in Figure 4, and Group A in Figure 5) while the latter set of pronunciations are common in Latin America (Group B in Figure 4 and Group B in Figure 5).

Similar to the vowels in the traditional dialect system, the overall vowel system of Plautdietsch is deterritorialized in Latin America. As with other deterritorialized forms (e.g., the vowels of the traditional dialect system), people had a less direct awareness of the variation. As a result, it is much more difficult to elicit social commentary about the variation. Consultants who inherited a Latin American affiliation reported no known variation across vowel classes undergoing changes, but consultants who adopted a Latin American affiliation later in life (e.g., TX08, KS07) noticed differences outside of the traditional dialect system.

Although speakers from southern Mexico reported that Plautdietsch vowels are the same, the recordings of Herman Rempel changed this assessment for one speaker. HPC01, the Sommerfeld male discussed above, uses traditional dialect features similar to those of Herman Rempel. Even though Plautdietsch is not standardized, upon hearing Rempel's speech, HPC01 identified the pronunciation as both “different” and “more correct” than his own. This provides evidence that some Latin American speakers have an indirect awareness of variation in the vowel system given that the main difference between HPC01's and Rempel's pronunciation is the vowel system (Rempel is in Group D of Figure 4 while HPC01 is in Group B).

In order to get a sense of how the variation in Latin America may have spread, we first have to know who likely initiated the innovation. If we adopt Burns' (2016a, b) proposed timing of the initial changes in the Mexican vowel system (see § 1.1), early parts of the vowel shift would have been underway before the first major migration out of Mexico to Belize began, which occurred 30 years after the initial settlement of Mexico. This implicates the most conservative groups as the leaders of the vowel shift because by the time Mexican Mennonites settled in Belize, the first Mexican Molotschna settlement, Jagüeyes, was approximately 10 years old and was significantly smaller than the older, larger, and more influential Chortitza settlements formed by the Old Colony and Reinland.

A second clue to the social motivations of the vowel shift lies in the vowel shift's application in other languages. As was mentioned in § 4, High German is already known to be territorialized in the community. Although High German data were not collected for this study, speakers of Latin American background often referenced High German vowel differences when asked about differences in the way people spoke. The people who talked about High German always mentioned the variation discussed in § 4: High German <a> as either [a] (by moderates) or [au]/[o:] (by conservatives) as in Standard German *Abraham* [abʁəham] as [aubrəhaum]/[o:brəho:m].<sup>10</sup> To date, scholars have not connected the relationship between the

vowel shift and the Mexican Mennonite variation in High German <a>, but this variation looks strikingly similar to the sequence of developments in High German [tasə] > Plautdietsch [taus] ‘cup’ > shifted [to:s]. In effect, the pronunciation of High German <a> underwent the Plautdietsch vowel shift in the Latin American community starting in Mexico.

Although we lack firsthand written accounts of how early conservative settlers in Mexico viewed their spoken language, we do have insight into how they viewed their relationship with Canadian Mennonites. Tina Siemens reports that after her family left Canada for Mexico, they, like many other early settlers, were eager to differentiate themselves in every way possible from those who stayed in Canada. They believed that differentiating themselves would signal the religious differences that they saw between the righteous (who moved) and the unrighteous (who stayed). According to Siemens, clothing was an important way to distinguish themselves, but so was language. Today, conservative communities in Latin America justify using [o:] instead of [a] when speaking High German because they believe that using the shifted [o:] represents humility while the failure to use the shifted [o:] is a direct reflection of pride and haughtiness. This has given rise to the monikers “humble-[o:]” for the shifted form and “proud-[o:]” for the unshifted form (my own fieldwork; Hedges 1996; Klassen 2016). The views towards the use of [a] closely align to the justification given by Siemen's relatives for destroying clothing from Canada discussed in § 3.1.

People who are not from a conservative background in Mexico reject the rationale for using [o:] in High German. These moderates refuse to use this form as they feel it represents a break-down in the knowledge of High German (my own fieldwork; Cox 2013, 56; Klassen 2016). It is notable that speakers focus intensely on High German because it is the religious language for both communities and the main means of transmission is in the community's religious schools. In this sense, the application of the vowel shift to the religious language has effectively become socially territorialized in Latin America. Less conservative speakers are not, however, aware of the extent to which conservatives have historically placed ideological value on their whole language system as Siemens suggested. This means that while High German

<sup>10</sup> Full proper names are sometimes referred to as the High German variants whereas nicknames are sometimes referred to as the Plautdietsch name.

vowels became territorialized because people were aware that the religious language itself had religious significance, Plautdietsch vowels did not undergo territorialization. If anything, the vowel shift's social significance became deterritorialized in Plautdietsch as less conservative newcomers moved to Mexico and sought to participate in the broader Mexican Chortitza dominated social space.

In Mexico, the shifting Plautdietsch vowel system likely deterritorialized and became the main regional variant because both moderate and conservative settlers had some common religious ground. Both groups feared government interference in their day-to-day lives (see the discussion about schools in § 3.1). Some recent Canadian immigrants to southern Mexico, who do not belong to the conservative congregations, talked to me at length about Mexico being a place where parents, as opposed to the state, dictate the educational and therefore religious direction of their children. This is the same issue that brought the original conservative Canadian Chortitza settlers to Mexico in 1922.

In effect the vowel shift was able to spread because moderate congregations in Mexico did not entirely object to the conservative's religious views concerning migration and establishing a new social space. This left them open to interacting with conservatives and eventually adopting some of their behaviors. These moderates, however, drew the line in adopting behaviors from conservatives when the behavior was explicitly linked to a religious position that the moderates did not want to adopt.

## 6. CLOSING

This article has explored linguistic change in Plautdietsch as it relates to language variation. I have argued that Plautdietsch encodes many aspects of the Mennonite community and their collective history. The history and culture of the speakers are both key to understanding social aspects of how language changes. In this article, I explored social aspects of "space" in the Mennonite community which are related to, yet distinct from, physical locations. While some physical regions are characterized by a predominant linguistic pattern, an individual's social commitment to ideological spaces, people from certain

spaces, and religious practices associated with those spaces adds a layer of complexity to the distribution of linguistic variation. Changes in one's physical space can be just as consequential to the distribution and redistribution of linguistic forms as changes in one's ideological space.

The different spatial social motivations behind Plautdietsch variation create a challenge for anyone who seeks to document the language. On the one hand, documentation of linguistic forms can involve just the creation of a physical record (e.g., written or audio), but often language documentation also involves statements about social information and the history of linguistic forms. As there are different layers of space within the community, the researcher has to be tuned in to both hyper-localized variation and transregional variation in order to understand what is reflected in the speech patterns of a single community.

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**APPENDIX: PARTICIPANT METADATA**

The metadata come from direct conversations and interactions with participants. As Herman Rempel's data were not gathered from direct interactions, there are no notes for him.

<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Notes</b>
CA01	M	87	Oklahoma	Molotschna affiliated. Aware of Chortitza minority in his hometown growing up. Is aware that Mexican Mennonites are now present in his hometown. Encountered Russian and Kazakh Mennonites as an adult. Had no difficulty with their Plautdietsch.
CA03	F	92	Kansas	Molotschna affiliated. Developed a friendship with the Mexican migrants in California during the 70s.
ES01	M	24	South Mexico	Chortitza affiliated. Family left Old Colony for moderate Chortitza congregation.
HR	M	~64	Central Canada	N/A
HPC01	M	~40	North Mexico	Former moderate Chortitza. Not affiliated with a Mennonite congregation.
HPC02	M	22	North Mexico	Former Molotschna. Not affiliated with Mennonite congregation. Married outside of the community. Relative of HPC03.
HPC03	F	18	North Mexico	Former Molotschna. Not affiliated with Mennonite congregation. Relative of HPC02.
HPC04	F	~30	Central Canada	Molotschna affiliated. Moved to Mexico
KS01	M	86	Nebraska	Molotschna affiliated. Speaks Plautdietsch daily with wife. Worked with members of the Mexican migration to Kansas. Knows KS09
KS02	F	91	Kansas	From a mixed Chortitza and Molotschna background. Associates with Molotschna.
KS03	M	83	Nebraska	Molotschna affiliated. Forgot Plautdietsch until he was on a trip to Mexico. Has maintained it ever since. Is aware of Latin American community in Kansas.
KS04	F	88	Kansas	Molotschna affiliated. Speaks Plautdietsch with her husband.
KS05	F	84	Kansas	Molotschna affiliated. Speaks Plautdietsch with her husband.
KS06	F	89	Kansas	Molotschna affiliated. Speaks Plautdietsch with her husband.
KS07	M	95	Minnesota	Molotschna affiliated.
KS08	F	35	Central Canada	Chortitza affiliated. Remembers switching speech patterns when she started interacting with Mexican group. Relative of KS09
KS09	F	41	Texas	Chortitza affiliated. Has worked with some descendants of original Molotschna settlers of Kansas. Knows KS01. Relative of KS08.
KS10	F	44	Bolivia	Chortitza affiliated. Views variation in speech to be linked to other congregations (specifically said Sommerfeld speak differently from other Chortitza groups).

Speaker	Gender	Age	Region	Notes
KS11	F	41	North Mexico	Chortitza affiliated. Views variation in speech to be linked to other congregations (specifically said Sommerfeld speak differently from other Chortitza groups).
KS12	M	50	North Mexico	Chortitza affiliated
KS13	F	93	Kansas	Molotschna affiliated.
MT01	M	38	Central Canada	Parents did not want to transmit Plautdietsch due to English preference, but learned anyways and is a fluent speaker. Family interacted with migrant laborers and traveled to visit relatives in other countries. Very liberal and unrepentantly upset conservatives in Bolivia in public forum.
NE01	F	41	Belize	Molotschna affiliated.
NE02	F	20	Belize	Molotschna affiliated.
SF01	F	25	North Mexico	Molotschna affiliated.
SF03	F	20	North Mexico	Molotschna affiliated.
SF04	M	30	South Mexico	Former Old Colony, now Molotschna affiliated. Parents very publicly broke from Old Colony. Remembers being banned, reports his children were also banned. Relative of SF06.
SF05	F	28	North Mexico	Molotschna affiliated.
SF06	F	~18	South Mexico	Molotschna affiliated. Parents very publicly broke from Old Colony. Doesn't have vivid memories of break. Relative of SF04.
SF07	M	~50	North Mexico	From a conservative Chortitza background. Molotschna affiliated. Held office.
SF08	F	~23	South Mexico	Former Old Colony. Parents very publicly broke from Old Colony. Not affiliated with a Mennonite congregation. Relative of SF09.
SF09	M	~25	South Mexico	Former Old Colony. Parents very publicly broke from Old Colony. Not affiliated with a Mennonite congregation. Relative of SF08.
SF10	F	~18	Central Canada	Not affiliated with a Mennonite congregation. Grandparents were Chortitza. Mexican <i>Rückwanderung</i>
SF11	M	~35	South Mexico	Former moderate Chortitza. Currently Molotschna affiliated.
SF12	M	~28	South Mexico	Former Old Colony. Currently Molotschna affiliated.
SF13	M	~29	South Mexico	Related to both Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonites in the region. Currently Molotschna affiliated.
SF14	M	~35	South Mexico	Former Old Colony. Currently Molotschna affiliated.
SF15	F	~18	South Mexico	Molotschna affiliated.
TX01	M	35	Bolivia	Hinted that his family had been targets of banning. Currently moderate Chortitza affiliated with Canadian influence.
TX02	F	46	Texas	Former Old Colony. Currently in a moderate-liberal congregation. Congregation was Mennonite but changed to allow more people in. One of the original settlers in West Texas.
TX03	M	38	Texas	Chortitza affiliated. Came to the US while young.
TX04	F	23	Texas	Chortitza affiliated.

Speaker	Gender	Age	Region	Notes
TX05	M	34	North Mexico	Chortitza affiliated.
TX06	F	41	Texas	Chortitza affiliated. Grew up between Central Canada and Texas. <i>Mexican Rückwanderung.</i>
TX07	F	23	Germany	Liberal Mennonite affiliated. Learned Plautdietsch from Russian grandparents.
TX08	M	19	North Mexico	From an Old Colony family. No one in family is currently in group. Learned Plautdietsch from friends instead of parents.
TX09	F	42	Central Canada	Chortitza affiliated. Born in Mexico, but raised in Central Canada. <i>Mexican Rückwanderung.</i>
TX10	F	48	North Mexico	Molotschna affiliated. From a well-known Molotschna dominant region of North Mexico. Related to TX11.
TX11	F	76	North Mexico	Molotschna affiliated. From a well-known Molotschna dominant region of North Mexico. Related to TX10.
TMP01	M	~55	North Mexico	Active practicing Old Colony (although frequently interacts with outsiders and uses prohibited technology with no repercussions).