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AUTHOR Roberts, Cheryl A.; Gaies, Stephen J.
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ABSTRACT

Since 1965, Amish children in Buchanan County, Iowa have been exempted from state requirements to attend centralized schools and, instead, are taught in small rural schools with a traditional curriculum through grade 8. More recent federal laws mandate provision of special services to limited-English-proficient (LEP) students in this group. Some schools have refused English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) services, which currently include diagnostic testing, recommendations on materials adaptation and purchase, inservice teacher workshops, and consultation on planning for the future. Administrator attitudes have been positive to neutral. Teachers have generally been receptive to workshops and new ideas. Parents have expressed guarded approval, preferring minimal change. The new program design resembles sheltered English, with subjects taught in English. However, the goals of sheltered English and of the Amish differ. Sheltered English programs are intended to mainstream students, while the Amish community prefers separation. Development of a program model tailored to the goals and language functions deemed important in this and other unique communities, such as native American groups, could be useful. Some methods and content are considered inappropriate for the Amish, and challenge currently-accepted methodology. Inservice training must match teacher needs and goals, and testing must be adapted for the population (MSE)

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English for Amish Children in Iowa: Sociolinguistic Dimensions

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Cheryl A. Roberts
Stephen J. Gaies
University of Northern Iowa

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The Old Order Amish Mennonite community of Buchanan County, Iowa

is part of a much larger Amish community numbering more than 100,000 that has spread throughout North and South America. Descendants of early sixteenth century Mennonites, the Amish emigrated to the New World from Europe in the early 1700's. Like so many other early immigrants to the New World, the Amish sought the freedom to practice their religious beliefs.

The first Amish settlements in the New World were in southeastern Pennsylvania, which remains for most people the "typical" locale of the communities that are widely referred to as the "Pennsylvania Dutch." However, throughout the Midwest--in Ohio, northern Indiana, and in eastern Iowa--numerous Amish communities continue to flourish.

The Amish first arrived in Iowa in the 1840's--they were among the first white settlers in Iowa--and established prosperous settlements in southeastern Iowa. In 1914 a small group of Old Order Amish from Kalona, Iowa moved to Buchanan County, in northeastern Iowa. Today, the Old Order Amish of Buchanan County make up the second largest Old Order Amish community in Iowa.

The Old Order Amish are the most conservative of the many groups within the Mennonite Church. More than any other Mennonite group, the Old Order Amish have resisted acculturation for the almost 300 years of their history in the Western Hemisphere. Any description of the history of the Old Order Amish or of contemporary Amish life--whether the interest is in the Amish as a utopian community, as a distinctive system of social and

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economic organization, or as the product of a particular system of cultural maintenance and transmission--must acknowledge the resistance of acculturation as the central feature of Amish life.

The basis of this resistance to acculturation is the belief, drawn from the Scriptures (1 Peter 2:9) that the Amish are a "peculiar people" who must insulate themselves from the influences of outside groups. Specific tenets and practices of the Amish--for example, adult baptism, the refusal to bear arms or to swear oaths, or the practice of shunning members of the community who have violated particular injunctions--contribute to the distinctiveness of the Amish as a group. However, an equally important part of Amish life is the belief in the superiority of agrarian life--the view that farming as a way of life has the force of a moral directive. The Amish have a deep commitment to the soil both in terms of their responsibility for its proper use and their reliance on it for their livelihood. For the Old Order Amish, farming is the only acceptable occupation, since they believe that as farmers they can live closer to God and better serve him.

The separation of the Amish from outside influences is achieved not through an agrarian life alone, but by virtue of related characteristics of Amish life that are inseparably linked to farming: the ideal of economic self-sufficiency (combined with a strong system of mutual assistance within the Amish community) and of austerity. The Old Order Amish differ from more liberal Amish and other Mennonite groups in Iowa and elsewhere precisely in terms of how tenaciously their communities adhere to these three features: family farming as the exclusive means of livelihood; the refusal to use any modern technology that reduces the self-sufficiency of the community; and the rejection of all unnecessary worldly goods. Indeed, one of the less well-known features of Amish society is the role of migration

as a safety valve: when groups within a community differ over what innovations are acceptable and what innovations threaten the insulation of the community from the mainstream, the more conservative group will typically break off and form a new community. Indeed, it was precisely for this reason that a new Amish community was originally established in Buchanan County: the Amish who migrated did so because of their feeling that the Kalona Amish had grown too worldly.

The most obvious threat to any ethnolinguistic minority is the often irresistible influence of mainstream society. For that reason, the Amish minimize contact with outsiders, as has already been mentioned, as much as possible. Conflicts with mainstream society are avoided. However, conflict is sometimes inevitable: perhaps the best example is pressure from compulsory education laws. In the past, children in many agricultural states such as Iowa were educated in rural settings, one or two room schoolhouses of multiple grades and few teachers. Basic skills were taught, discipline was maintained, rural values were reinforced. The Amish believed that schooling was important: they wanted their children to learn English, arithmetic, reading, and so on, until the children are 13 or 14 years old, or until 8th grade. At this age, they join their parents in the fields or in the home and learn the skills they need to fulfill their roles in the community as good Amish men and women.

As mainstream society changed, however, two aspects of education have also changed: first, the curriculum of schools today is considerably more "worldly" than that of even a decade ago. Health education, including human sexuality, and so on, is directly counter to Amish moral teachings. Second, due to economic pressures, many small rural schools have been consolidated into large, centralized schools, equipped with a number of

technological tools for learning, and requiring the busing of large numbers of students. The Old Order Amish object to their children being bused (although they do, in fact, use public buses to visit family and friends in other states), but the greater danger is the increased exposure to large numbers of "outsiders", with their different value systems, and exposure to modern conveniences, such as television, stereos, computers, etc., which might entice their children to worldly desires. It was inevitable that conflict arise.

In many cases, the Amish sought to avoid confrontation by establishing small, private schools of their own, with classes only to the 8th grade, staffed by Amish teachers, nearly all of whom had had only an 8th grade education themselves. This has generally required some sort of compromise with the state.

In Buchanan County, the Amish wanted to keep the rural schools open, continue to be a part of the public school system, but with the traditional curriculum and with students leaving after finishing 8th grade. The conflict was seen as a challenge to the state's right to set and enforce educational standards; the Amish were concerned that the state was directly threatening the moral values upon which the community was established and indeed, draws its strength and identity. The conflict came to a head in 1965 when the superintendent and a truant officer boarded a bus and went to the rural schools to collect the students and take them to school in town. The fathers were outside; as pacifists they would not resist, but they voiced their protests. The mothers were inside with the children: some were weeping, others clearly frightened. As they moved outside to the buses, someone shouted "Run!" in Amish German, and the children broke away and ran for the nearby woods. Photographers captured the scene, and the public

reaction to the event was overwhelmingly sympathetic to the Amish. (Erickson, 1975:43-47). Public officials were clearly in a difficult situation: they resolved it by adopting what has come to be known as the "Amish exemption", which exempts the Amish from compliance with the state standards laws upon recommendation by the state superintendent, who is to base the exemption on the children's continued progress in school subjects. The Act was passed in 1967, and since that time, the Old Order Amish in Buchanan County have continued to send their children to the rural schools, grades K-8th, staffed by public school, non-Amish teachers who essentially teach the traditional curriculum.

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been equilibrium between the Amish schools and the state, although occasionally charges have been made that some of the Amish schools are below the educational standards called for in the exemption. Recently, however, other Department of Education requirements instituted since the exemption was granted have brought the issue to life again. For example, state laws have been established which require non-discriminatory, non-sexist education. By most definitions, the Amish school children must be considered a segregated ethnic minority. Ironically, state law, intended to protect minority rights, acts contrary to the will of the Amish. In addition, curricular requirements such as health education are unwelcome to the Amish parents, who object to the teachers when their children read an article in the Reader's Digest dealing with such issues.

Since the Supreme Court's decision in *Lau vs. Nichols*, 1974, that language minority children are barred from equal educational opportunities (Hakuta, 1986), many states have passed laws mandating the identification and provision of services to LEP children. Iowa's law is representative:

school districts are required to identify LEP children, assess their English proficiency, and provide ESL or bilingual education services to them. In Buchanan County (as in other parts of the state) administrators were unaware of the law and hence did not enforce it. Only recently, when a new superintendent was named, did anyone in the district recognize that the Amish children might be language minority. He contacted the state, who contacted the local LEP consultant, who visited three Amish (public) rural schools for the purpose of assessing the students' language proficiency. At that time, in 1988-89, results of an oral interview, reading test, and writing sample showed that 91% of the (80) students, K-8th grade, scored as NES or LES. There are four other Amish rural schools in a neighboring district whose superintendent was made aware of the opportunity--indeed, requirement--for LEP consultative services but refused them in order not to upset the existing balance.

The ESL services currently provided include diagnostic testing, recommendations on materials adaptation and purchase, in-service workshops for the teachers, and consultation on planning for the future. How has the Amish community, the parents and children, responded to this new episode in the schooling of Amish children? How have the administrators and teachers reacted?

The attitudes of the administrators involved has been positive to neutral--without the efforts of the superintendent, no changes would have been made at all. The principal has been willing to defer to the superintendent's decisions. The teachers may be the most critical link. Each of the three rural schools has 2 teachers: the senior teacher and an aide. All are women; none are Amish. Most are in their 50's or early 60's and have been teaching the Amish children for years. Somewhat surprisingly, they

have been very open to the regularly scheduled in-service workshops and very cooperative in the testing of the children. While they sometimes feel that what they need most is more teachers, they have been receptive to new ideas and materials. Since the teachers' attitudes will surely influence the parents and children (through regular conferences and classroom modeling), it has been of immeasurable value to have them on the side of ESL services.

The parents of this very conservative group of Amish have expressed guarded approval: their primary concern is that the current situation not change too much. While they appreciate the new traveling art and music teachers, and recognize the potential benefits of language-specific in-service training, they are worried that methods and/or materials may change too much, letting in some of the worldiness that they strive to protect their children from. The challenge to the ESL professional is to improve the quality of the education the children receive without imposing a different world view with concomitant changes in methods and materials. For example, the introduction of television or computers would be adamantly opposed.

As ESL professionals, this situation has stimulated our thinking in several areas. First, what instructional design model best describes this setting? It is neither submersion or immersion; sheltered English seems the closest match. Sheltered English is a program model that Krashen (1985) describes as "immersion-style comprehensible subject-matter teaching" (p. 17). In this model, native speakers (except teachers and aides) are excluded from the classroom, and all materials, texts, presentations, and so on are in the target language, in this case, English. Because they do not have to compete with native speakers, the students are not disadvantaged. The focus of the classes is on the subject matter: English is learned through the

learning of math, social studies, geography, and so on. The subject is made more comprehensible through the greater use of pictures, charts, maps and so on; through the use of simpler language at earlier grades; and through materials adapted to be more accessible to non-native speakers. Sheltered English is especially appropriate for meeting the needs of a fairly homogeneous language minority group. One difference, however, between the usual Sheltered English model and the Amish rural school situation is the physical separation of these students from their American peers. Another is that while materials in Sheltered English programs are adapted for language, in the Amish situation adaptations are made for language and content.

But the most striking difference is that the goals of sheltered English and the Amish are radically different: students in sheltered English programs are to be mainstreamed as soon as possible, while the Amish intend to remain apart.

The development of a more appropriate model could be of use in other similar settings, as with groups such as the Hutterites, a communal society in Nebraska and the Dakotas, and Native American groups. Such a model should specify to some extent the goals and language functions deemed important by the client groups while remaining flexible enough to account for differences between such groups.

A related area of concern to ESL professionals relates to materials and curricular decisions. The Amish children do not have Physical Education classes and only recently have had art and music--each for just one hour per week. How well will methods like TPR work when physical activity is not considered a "school activity"? The parents exert some control over materials: they disapprove of sexual or health topics and will prohibit their children from using materials deemed "worldly." No electrical equipment is

permitted: no radios, cassette players, TVs, VCRs, or computers. Some conservative families disapprove of the use of guitars to accompany singing. These restrictions must be taken into account when making curricular decisions.

A third area of interest for us as professionals is the importance of the consultant-teacher relationship. While in-service training can be assigned by higher administrators, nothing of value will result unless the teachers feel there is something to learn and the consultant makes some effort to match the training to the needs and goals of teachers.

Finally, assessment of English language proficiency is of great concern. A popular assumption is that all language minority children, given an English-speaking environment, will learn the language painlessly and undramatically. Instead, test results for the Amish schools show that very few of the students can be classified as proficient. These tests included measures of speaking and listening (through an oral interview), reading (through cloze passages) and writing (through a writing sample) (Hamayan, 1985). As expected, scores tended to be higher on speaking and listening skills, but only a very small minority of the students classified as fluent English speakers. Indeed, there is a remarkable amount of variability among this small sample. Further research is needed to explore factors that might be responsible for such variability. The issue of testing itself must be addressed as well. Labov's classic study (1972) demonstrated the importance of researcher and setting on student performance. In one of the Amish schools, one child could not be tested because she burst into tears out of fear of the "English woman." Tape players cannot be used, and certain testing tasks such as cloze or writing short descriptions are unfamiliar to the children. To illustrate the difficulty, Amish children perform poorly when

asked to make up a story, because their society encourages conformity and learning from those older and wiser than they are. The entire notion of "proficiency" must, in this case, be more directly associated with students' needs and goals, and the functional uses to which the language will be put. This means considering proficiency as it relates to school goals as well as how it relates to uses after students leave school and become members of their Amish community.

CONCLUSIONS

While the Old Order Amish in Buchanan County are not numerically important, the unique qualities of the group provide a useful perspective for examining different aspects of ESL--from goals to materials to instructional models to evaluation of language skills. The fact that the Amish maintain a relatively homogeneous social group can make variations in these factors stand out clearly.

Furthermore, though the ESL endorsement exists in Iowa, it is not to be expected that the state require it of teachers--and this is true of many other areas and states in this country. We cannot count on an ESL endorsement as the way to best serve LEP students. A more flexible approach is needed.

Finally, it is ironic that we think of ESL as a way of promoting equal opportunity while these particular clients are not interested in competing with "outsiders." We tend to arrogantly believe that everyone in America shares the same values and goals--not true! Instead, we should conduct an ethnographic needs assessment in our capacity as language professionals, and avoid the kinds of judgmental errors that are sometimes easy to make.

The Old Order Amish are a fascinating group to work with, a superb example of a society's ability to maintain its distinctiveness, and a valuable resource for insights on the relationship between language and society.

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