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Language and Identity at School and at Home

Language Shift among Mennonites in Paraguay

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Abstract

This essay has investigated the question of an ongoing language shift from Plattdeutsch and German to Spanish among the Mennonites in Paraguay and the role of the school in this process. The aims of the study were to compare the use of languages among the Mennonites in Asuncion and in the Menno colony and to identify the importance that parents give to the languages and to compare this with a school leader perspective. The aim was also to identify factors that influence the language shift and identify the influence that the shift exerts on Mennonite values and identity. The results are based on my own observations, interviews with Mennonite women and interviews with key informants who have insight into the school policy issues. The outcome may be used as a basis for educational and language planning. There is a need to consciously sit down and re-define the Mennonite identity and to make the community and the school aware of their responsibility in language maintenance.

Descriptors: Language use, ethnic identity, bilingualism, education, Mennonites, Paraguay

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1 Introduction

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.'

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel – because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world.' From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

(Genesis 11:1-9)

At least since the time of the book of Genesis people have spoken different languages. Most reference books give an estimated figure of around 6,000 languages spoken in the world today. This number cannot be taken for a fact since we do not know the exact amount. However we do know that there are fewer than 200 countries in the world. This means that an enormous amount of 'language contact' takes place; people speaking different languages come into contact with one another. One in three of the world's populations routinely uses two or more languages for work, family and leisure (Li Wei 2000). Many people have learnt a foreign language at school. If we count all these people as bilingual speakers then monolinguals in the world today would be a tiny minority.

Language is an important part of our identity. By choosing a language we choose to identify ourselves with a group of speakers and certain norms and values. It is important to highlight the issue of bilingualism since more and more people meet and use more than one language in their everyday life. The question is what positive and negative effects this has on our society.

Van der Stoel (1997:153) stated when launching *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* that:

'...in the course of my work, it had become more and more obvious to me that education is an extremely important element for the preservation and deepening of the identity of persons belonging to a national minority. It is of course also clear that education in the language of the minority is of vital importance for such a minority.'

In the world there are many bilingual societies and many countries that have more than one official language. One example is Paraguay which has Spanish, brought by the Spanish colonisers, and the indigenous language Guaraní as official languages. In Paraguay one of the minority groups is the Mennonites. They are a religious community that for a long time has lived quite isolated in colonies in Paraguay. Some live in the sparsely populated area called Chaco in the north-western part of Paraguay. The Menno colony, one of the colonies in Chaco has had the function of a state within a state with its own laws, police and schools. However, lately the colonies are starting to open up more and more to the surrounding culture, the Paraguayan culture. This affects many of the bonds that previously have tied the Mennonites together. One example is the language. Traditionally, the Mennonites in Paraguay have used

Plattdeutsch and German. However, there is today a growing tendency to use more and more Spanish. How is then the change of language affecting the Mennonite identity?



1.1 Aim and hypotheses

The overriding aim of this study is to explore and illustrate the process of language shift from Plattdeutsch to German and Spanish or from Plattdeutsch and German to Spanish among Mennonites in Paraguay and to demonstrate the role of the school in this process. I have chosen to use the name Plattdeutsch for the dialect spoken by the Mennonites in Paraguay instead of the English word Low German in order to avoid confusion with the Low German spoken today in Germany.

A previously closed colony is opening up and spreading out among other cultures - does this change their view of themselves as Mennonites? The criteria defining language maintenance and shift in the present study are reported language proficiency and language behaviour in different domains, such as home, work place and in leisure time activities. It may be the case that Plattdeutsch and German are losing their importance among Mennonites in Paraguay in each successive generation and the school plays an important role in this process.

Specific aims:

- Compare the use of languages in the community and in the school in Asuncion and in the Menno colony in Chaco.
- Identify the degree of importance that parents of young children and parents of adult children give to Plattdeutsch and other languages.
- Examine beliefs and observations from a school-leader perspective concerning the relative status of the languages/varieties concerned.
- Identify factors that influence the language shift among the Mennonites.
- Identify the influences that the change of languages exerts on the Mennonite values and identity.

1.2 Relevance

Throughout the Mennonite history in the Menno colony in the Chaco, Paraguay, the school has played an important role in changing different institutions (such as church and economy). It also plays an important role when it comes to the use of different languages. The choice of language for education will help a language to survive or speed its extinction as well as supporting some sections of the society while creating obstacles for others. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) says: 'Languages are today being murdered faster than ever before in human history /.../ The media and the educational systems are the most important direct agents in language murder.'

By teaching certain languages and not others the school gives its pupils tools to communicate in those languages. What languages are taught affects what cultures the pupils may have access to. Since the Menno colony is a multilingual community, teachers at the Mennonite schools are daily faced with the question of language, it is therefore important to be aware of the complexity of the issue. Wedin (in press) writes that 'if local teachers and school leaders gain insight into phenomena which may have been hidden or not generally known, they can, themselves, work towards the development of new classroom practices which are more relevant to the local situation' (my translation). This essay therefore aims to raise awareness of the consequences the teaching and the use of different languages among the Mennonites may have so that possible actions can be taken.

This essay also brings out the identity issues that any individual with two or more languages or dialects face. These questions of identity are closely connected to language. The values and norms that one identifies oneself with by using a certain language are of current interest in Sweden as well, because of the large number of children and youths that use more than one language in their daily life, perhaps one language at home and then Swedish at school and with friends. A greater awareness of the connection between language and identity can also give a greater understanding of how to support these children and youths.

Still today, there are isolated minorities that more or less have been protected from the surrounding industrialism and capitalism. With the spreading of technology it gets harder and harder for these minorities to keep on being isolated. The Menno colony is one example of a minority that previously has been isolated and is now opening up. This essay gives some examples of consequences in the area of language use when a population gets wealthier and the influences of the surrounding cultures and technology are growing stronger.

The essay also aims to fill in a gap in our knowledge of the Mennonite community in Paraguay. It aims as well to raise awareness levels concerning the linguistic situation of the Mennonite community and the risk that the dialect might be lost in the future, especially since it is not supported by any official institution such as the school or the church, and the workplace is dominated by German or Spanish. My particular status as a new member of the community (for reasons of a personal relationship) allows me access to informants that would not be possible for another researcher. I am in a position to study what Milroy (1991) refers to as in-group variation, how the members vary their speech, which he writes is highly complicated and difficult for outsiders to access.

1.3 Outline of the study

In this introductory chapter I have presented the topic of the study, stated its primary aims and specific aims and presented the relevance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides background information on Paraguay and the history, beliefs and life of Mennonites in Paraguay as well as their linguistic situation. It also presents an overview of previous studies done on the subject of bilingualism and identity as well as a brief description of the concept of endangered languages.

Chapter 3 presents the method used, hermeneutics, as well as the group of interviewees chosen to participate in this study and ethical and cultural considerations. It also includes a detailed description of the procedure of the interview. The results are presented in chapter 4. In chapter 5, I discuss the results concerning bilingualism and identity among Mennonites in Paraguay. And finally, chapter 6 provides a conclusion regarding the future of the Mennonite identity and the different languages.

2 Previous research

There is a branch in the research world that claims that a researcher who intends to do a qualitative study may incorporate stereotypes, prejudices or preconceived ideas and then confirm them if he or she studies what other researchers have said and done before in the area. And by doing this one might overlook or even fail to note new discoveries. It is claimed that one should enter a research neutral and impartial into the particular area of research. (Backman 1998:51). However, I believe that it is crucial for the present study to review literature and other information about the area of research in order to understand the life of the Mennonites in Paraguay and to be able to interpret the results in a correct way. Looking at Mennonite history will therefore give a deeper understanding of possible reasons for the answers made in questionnaires and interviews. It is also important to understand the concepts of bilingualism and identity and how they interact and affect the individual. I will therefore begin by giving an introduction to Paraguay, the country in which the Mennonites interviewed live and then continue with Mennonite history and life. This will be followed by a literature review of research in the area of bilingualism and identity as well as research done in this area among Mennonites. The aim of this review is to locate the present study of language choice and identity of a Mennonite community within a broad historical and theoretical framework.

2.1 Paraguay

Paraguay is situated in the centre of South America. It borders on Bolivia in the northwest, Brazil in the east and Argentina in the south. It had a small population of about 5.5 million people in 2002 (The World Bank Group 2003). About 60% of the country's land area is very sparsely populated, only 2 percent (U.S. Department of state 2003) of the population lives here. It is called The Gran Chaco and it is here where the first Mennonite colony, the Menno colony, was established in 1927.

Paraguay has two official languages, Spanish and Guaraní. However as a country of many immigrants there are several other languages as well. Two of them are Plattdeutsch and High German (Hochdeutsch) which are spoken by the Mennonites.

2.2 Mennonites

In order to understand the language situation that Mennonites in Paraguay experience today some background information about their culture, beliefs and history is needed. The group is named after one of its first leaders, Menno Simons. The meaning of the word Mennonite is to belong to an evangelical church or congregation of the Mennonite denomination. Mennonite is therefore a confessional concept (Dyck 2002:2). However, in Paraguay the word Mennonite is often used as an ethnic concept meaning Mennonite immigrants and their descendants. Using this meaning of the word, many people from the Mennonite colonies who do not go to a Mennonite church are still included. On the other hand, people who belong to a Mennonite church but are not ethnically Mennonites (about 13.500) are generally not called Mennonites even though, according to the original definition, they should be. In this essay I will use the word Mennonite as an ethnic concept since this is the most frequent meaning in Paraguay.

About 1 million people in the world are baptised members of a Mennonite church. In 2003 the estimated number of baptised members spread over South America, Central America and Carrebean, North America, Europe, Africa and Asia was 1,297,966 (Neufeld 2003:73). There are about 30,000 Mennonites of immigrant origin in Paraguay of which 14,000 are baptised and belong to a Mennonite church (Dyck 2002:2). The Mennonite church has slowly gone from being an immigrant community to a national and universal church.

2.2.1 Mennonite history

Much of Mennonite history accounts for when, why and how Mennonite people have migrated from one area to another. Mennonite settlers have come to Paraguay from Canada, Germany and Russia and other countries for a number of reasons: religious freedom, the chance to practice their beliefs without hindrance and the quest for land.

The Mennonites have their ideological origins in the pacifist branch of the Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries in the 1520s. The ideological creeds that set them apart from the majority of other Protestant groups arising at this time were for example baptism only of adults upon confession of faith; insistence upon separation of church and state; refusal to bear arms; renunciation of participation in secular affairs of government; and refusal to take an oath (Sawatzky 1971). These beliefs got them into trouble in sixteenth-century Netherlands and Switzerland. In the Netherlands one influential proponent of Anabaptism was Menno Simons. He was originally a Catholic priest but left the Catholic Church in 1536 because he opted for the Anabaptist view of Scripture concerning the practice of infant baptism and the Lord's Supper. He was one of the first Anabaptists to present and explain a peace position as important. Most Anabaptist groups identified themselves as 'Mennists' after Menno Simons by the mid-1600s. As a result of contact with English-speaking neighbours, it has since been modified to 'Mennonites' (Mennonite Historical Society of Canada 1998).

As pacifists and defenders of a strict separation between church and state, the Mennonites have been on the move since the sixteenth century. Sawatsky (1971:2) writes that 'mobility within larger society leads to assimilation and the loss of the traditional way of life' and that is why the Mennonites repeatedly have found that making their living from an agrarian base and rural habitat is the best way to preserve their values and culture. In addition a conformity in secular and religious matters is important in order to maintain the integrity of the colonies.

Over the years many Mennonites moved to more tolerant areas such as Prussia (in what is now part of Russia and Poland) in search for economic opportunity and protection from religious persecution. The land of the noblemen benefited from the skills and industry of the Mennonites and in return they received 'letters of grace' (*Gnadenbrife*) that reaffirmed their right to residence and the practice of their religion. The letters were endorsed by the king. According to Sawatsky (1971:3) it was over a period of 200 years or more under these conditions that the Mennonites established the culture and folk identity which have marked their group coherence ever since

Mennonites from Prussia were then invited by Catherine II, the Great, of Russia to settle in her land. The Mennonites had the reputation of being excellent farmers, hard working and disciplined in their habits. The Russian Tsarina needed people to occupy land that had been seized from the Turkish army. In addition, in Poland, severe restrictions upon further purchase of land for the Mennonites were imposed and this hindered their economic life and posed a threat to the future integrity of their social and spiritual organisation. The Russian tsarina offered them free land and exemption from military and civil service, freedom of religion, the right to control their schools and churches and the right of agricultural colonies to be locally autonomous (Sawatsky 1971:5). The first colony in Russia, Chortitza, was therefore founded in 1789. About 6,000 Mennonites, some 1,150 families, were involved in establishing colonies in South Russia. This was the first large-scale migration in Mennonite society.

However, the Mennonites' privileged status in Russia came to an end in the 1870s when the separate administration of foreign colonies was abolished and they were incorporated into the prevailing Russian hierarchy of government (Francis 1955:32). What alarmed them the most was the threatened extinction of their exemption from military service (Sawatsky 1971:6). In 1874, the military question was solved in a manner acceptable to the majority of Mennonites. While some found a possibility of reconciling themselves to the terms of the compromise, others found that it compromised too much of the privileges promised to their forefathers and when the question of emigration was raised, the possibility of cheap farmland along with guarantees of religious freedom and exemption from military service in Canada seemed very attractive. Many Mennonites migrated therefore to Manitoba, Canada, from 1873-1884 while others stayed in Russia. The second major wave of Russian Mennonites migrated to Canada after the Russian Revolution in 1919. They faced an uncertain future with the emergence of the new communist government. The whole of the Russian society changed and old structures were destroyed. School education had to be in Russian and no religion was to be taught. However, few, if any, Mennonite teachers spoke Russian. In addition to this, Stalin's collectivisation meant that all farmers had to give up their private property and join *kolkhoz* farms and protests were severely punished (Nieuweboer 1998:4). Many Mennonites doubted that they would continue to be able to live and worship as they wished and therefore decided to emigrate.

However, World War I had generated a strong mistrust of all things German in Canada. The government decided to repeal their exemption from educating Mennonite children in English. In addition to this the Dominion government, in late 1916, let it be known that all males between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five must register with the authorities. It was made in order to determine the manpower situation in the country, however many Mennonites feared that registration was preliminary to a military call-up. And in 1917 military conscription was imposed in Canada when, like any others, young Mennonite men were called up. The Mennonites were forced to seek refuge again and looked to South America for help.

The Paraguayan government granted them political autonomy in its passing of Law No. 514 on July 26, 1921, referred to as the Privilegium by the Mennonites (Dyck 1993). The Mennonites agreed to colonise an area thought to be inhospitable and unproductive due to the lack of water in return for religious freedom, exemption from military service, the right to speak German in schools and elsewhere, and the right to administer their own educational, medical, and social organisations and institutions. They created a state within the state of Boquerón, the Menno colony. The first group that left Altona, Manitoba in Canada, on November 23, 1926 consisted of fifty-one families (309 persons). They were followed by other groups, a total of 1,767 persons in 1930. In the 1930s Mennonites came from Russia and the Ukraine via China and created the Fernheim colony. A third colony, Neuland, was founded in 1947 by refugees imprisoned in Soviet labour camps in Siberia after being sent as unwilling conscripts to the front lines of World War II by the German army. Today there are three colonies in Chaco, the dry north-western part of Paraguay, and 14 colonies in the fruitful eastern part of the country; some are more traditional than others. There are also a number of Mennonites living in Asuncion, not however as an organised colony but with their own educational and social security system.

2.2.2 The Menno Colony

The Menno colony was the first Mennonite colony established in Paraguay. It consisted of thirteen villages. The colonisers experienced a difficult period as they had to learn to work in a new environment with a new climate as well as fighting against tropical diseases. Despite of numerous migrations to Canada and some to Bolivia the colony has grown. In 1986 it had 6,600 inhabitants while in 2001 it had increased to more than 9,000 persons, comprising a land area of 679,186 ha, used in agriculture and ranching with the capital Loma Plata (3,400 inhabitants) (Wiebe 2001). However, today, the colony is not growing anymore. One reason is family planning. Previously there was an average of 10 children per family while today the number has decreased to 3 (Sawatsky 1996:69). There is also a strong migration to Canada. Some people migrate for economic reasons others in order to keep their Canadian citizenship.

The early Mennonites had to fight off poisonous snakes and tropical diseases; today, however, it is material prosperity and modernity, not destitution, that most threatens the unique Mennonite lifestyle. Many Mennonites have left the colony to settle down in Asuncion because of studies or work. Increasing numbers of Mennonites are also marrying out of their faith. The community is wealthier than ever, however this is at the expense of a step out of the traditions that previously protected the community from outside forces. Beer and tobacco that once were absolutely forbidden are now sold openly. Many people worry about future cultural decline. There is more and more influence of the world around the colonies. The Internet is replacing choir practice as the source of entertainment for adolescents. In the 2001 inventory, the people of the Menno colony owned 342 computers and 1,360 televisions (Wiebe 2001) and these numbers are rapidly increasing. These are a part of the daily life and something natural for young people of today. As shown in a joke in the *Menno Informiert*, a monthly newspaper in the Menno colony: ‘Grandpa, asked little Timmy, how did you actually know what you should eat when you were young since there were no televisions sets at that time?’ (Menno Informiert 2004, my translation)

2.2.3 Mennonites in Asuncion

From 1930, Mennonites have lived in Asuncion. By the 1950s about 300 Mennonites had moved there. Many moved in search of jobs and in 1935 the first students came to Asuncion from the Fernheim colony (Reimer 2000). Today about 1,100 Mennonites live there. Since 1976 the Mennonites have had their own school, el Colegio Alemán Concordia in Asunción. They also have a church, a residence home for old people and a playing field. Several work for the different Mennonite co-operatives or as businessmen. Many young people from the different colonies come to Asuncion to study at university.

As in the colony, the threat against the traditional Mennonite way of living is present and even stronger. The mixing with other cultures makes it more difficult to keep to the traditions that have for a long period of time united the Mennonites (Melander 2004). The way of living is different to the colony. Some young people moving to Asuncion to study have difficulties handling the new liberty they find in Asuncion, some even leave the church and the faith.

2.3 Bilingualism

Research concerning ethnic minorities and bilingualism as well as language maintenance has been carried out in a number of settings. The concept of bilingualism is not straightforward. The different dimensions of bilingualism are discussed by Li Wei (2000:6-7) where he points out the difficulties in defining who is bilingual and who is not. Is bilingualism dependent on how fluent the person is in two languages? Should bilinguals have equal competence in both languages in order to be called bilinguals? What about a person who can understand a second language perfectly but cannot speak it? What about a person who can speak a language but is not literate in it? This is the case of most Mennonites in the Menno colony where Plattdeutsch is the mothertongue, however, it is only spoken and not written. Instead German is used when writing. Many people understand it very well, both reading and listening, however they do not speak it perfectly or speak it but cannot write very well in German.

Furthermore, Mackey (1962) gives a description of the different questions used in defining bilingualism. According to Mackey, bilingualism is a relative concept and includes questions such as degree, function, alternation and interference. The question of degree refers to how well the individual knows the language he uses. How bilingual is he? The question of function refers to what the speaker uses his language for, in what situations. Alternation refers to the extent and way that the speaker alternates between his languages. Why does he alternate? And finally, the question of interference which asks how well the speaker keeps his languages apart? Does he mix them and then to what extent?

Longman dictionary of contemporary English gives the following definition of bilingual: 'able to speak two languages equally well'. However, the word 'bilingual' (*bilinguis* in Latin) primarily describes someone with the possession of two languages (Li Wei 2000:7) and this is the definition I am going to use in this study. A multilingual speaker uses different languages for different situations and purposes and does not always possess the same level or type or proficiency in each languages.

Li Wei (2000:24) argues that possible disadvantages of bilingualism tend to be temporary. There might be greater effort and time spent on maintaining two languages and bringing up the children bilingually. Some bilingual children might find it difficult to cope with the school

curriculum in either language for a short period of time. A more complex problem is that of bilingual identity, difficulties to identify with either language group. However, some bilinguals do not experience any difficulties at all concerning identity. And Wellros (1998) argues that bilingualism increases the possibilities of a positive identification with two ethnic groups and a valid membership in both.

Li Wei (2000:22-24) points out eight benefits for a bilingual person that are divided into communicative, cultural and cognitive advantages. Communicative: Being able to communicate in each parent's preferred language, extended family relationships, communicate with a wider variety of people than a monolingual, in transnational communication, are more attuned to the communicative needs of those with whom they talk. Cultural: Having two worlds of experience, a wider portfolio of jobs available. Cognitive: More awareness of language and more fluency, flexibility and elaboration in thinking than a monolingual.

Bilingualism may also take place on the level of society. In some bilingual communities the languages may play different roles. This is true for the traditional language situation between Plattdeutsch and German among the Mennonites. Fergusson has written a classic article on diglossia (1959), where he develops an approach to bilingualism where the co-existing languages of a community are likely to have different functions and to be used in different contexts. He makes a distinction between High and Low language where the High language often is perceived as more prestigious and more advanced. He claims that the choices bilingual speakers make reflect a set of society-wide norms. He suggests twelve areas in which the usage of language may differ. He indicates that the High language is used in a sermon in church, personal letters, speech in parliament and political speech, a university lecture, a news broadcast, a newspaper editorial and poetry. The Low variety, on the other hand is used in instructions to workmen, conversation with family, friends and colleagues, a radio 'soap opera', captions on political cartoons and folk literature.

If these twelve functions are applied to the situation in the Menno colony the majority follow the pattern which Fergusson has developed with some variation. For example sermons are mostly in German, however, occasionally they are in Plattdeutsch (often referred to as dialect among the Mennonites). Some of the political speeches may be in dialect, especially if they are delivered to workers to identify with the people. Plattdeutsch is spoken among family members, however, some parents today speak only German and do not teach their children Plattdeutsch. In neighbouring colonies a greater emphasis is put on the use of German and the proficiency of German is in general higher among Mennonites in these colonies. In Asuncion a minority speaks the dialect while the majority speaks German and Spanish. Cartoons are rarely produced in the colony and are therefore mostly in German. Several studies of diglossic societies have been made, for example a study about reading comprehension in literary Arabic (Abu-Rabia 2000) and about assimilation, stable diglossia or separatism in Britain (Wright 1990).

Fishman (1965) develops the idea of different functions further in what he calls domain analysis where he suggests that domains structure both the speakers' perception of the situation and their social behaviour, including language choice. He argues that certain domains, such as the family domain, seem to be more resistant to displacement than others, and domain analysis studied over time may be used to represent the evolution of language maintenance and language shift in a particular multilingual setting (Fishman 1965: 97,100). Kostoulas-Makrakis (1995) has studied language maintenance and shift among students of

Greek background in Sweden. He has looked at which language is used in different domains. Landweer (2001) has looked at indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality developed in a Papua New Guinea context. The indicators can be used to indicate, particularly through comparison of the indicators between languages within the same national context, the relative strength of a group's language. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) argue that there are two different ways in which features can spread from one language to another: borrowing and language shift. In borrowing, features from L2 are incorporated into L1 by native speakers of L1 while in language shift, native speakers of L1 introduce features from their native language L1 into L2 (the target language).

Mayers-Scotton (1988) suggests that language choice is symbolic of the social relationships between individuals. In her article she shows that certain sets of rights and obligations are conventionally associated with certain social situations. She has proposed the notion of markedness where unmarked choice is to follow the set of language rules that is associated with the social situation while a marked choice is used to redefine role relations and situations.

2.4 Language and Identity

Liebkind (1995) regards identity as a two-part concept – a subjective part (how I see myself) and an objective part (how others see me). She means that the identity of an individual develops in a continuous dynamic interaction between 'the self' and 'the others'. This concept is also brought up by a number of other researchers (Lange & Westin 1981, Sjögren 1998 and Wellros 1998). Thornborrow (2000:136) claims that 'identity /.../ is something which we are constantly building and negotiating all our lives through our interaction with others'. Erikson (1968) argues that the crucial period for formation of identity is in adolescence while Katz (1987) sees the formation of identity and ethnic socialisation as an continuous process across the life span.

The term identity can, according to Young and Begley (1982) be used as a global concept which involves both personal identity and ethnic or cultural identity. Ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the part of one's thinking, perceptions, feelings and behaviour that are due to ethnic group membership (Rotheram and Phinney 1987:13). However, as Singh (2000) points out, the definition is not clear-cut or uniform since the concept incorporates many characteristics and individuals can have multiple layers of ethnic identity. Erikson (1968:208) gives a definition of identity as a construct that denotes 'a conscious sense of individual uniqueness... an unconscious striving for continuity... [and] a solidarity with a group's ideals'. Öhman (1999) argues that the feeling of security in performing daily routines in the language required is also important in forming person's cultural identity.

Edwards (1985) emphasises that: (1) ethnic identity is related to ancestral links; (2) socialisation or cultural patterns may continue over generations without being necessarily associated with language; (3) some sense of group boundary must persist, even though the cultural content within these boundaries may have changed radically. Edwards argues that no particular objective indicator, e.g. language, is necessary for the continuation of an individual's identity. In fact, although it has been maintained that language is of importance to identity, history shows that language shift can take place without ethnic identity being reduced (Lewis 1980; Edwards 1985, 1988; Tamis 1990). Edwards (1985) further claims that ethnic identity can be maintained without actual use of the language associated with a

particular group. The language remains as a symbol but without its communicative function. Eastman (1984) calls this an *associated* language. The language is a part of a group's heritage and ethnic identity but the group members do not use it any longer or may not even know it.

Edwards (1985) further believes that the language aspect of ethnic identity is minimal and not of any importance and that identity inevitably continues even after the mother tongue has been abandoned. Neither does Arnstberg (1993) see language as an obvious marker of group identity. This is shown in a study by Lyon and Ellis (1991) where many Welsh-born people identify themselves with their own ethnic culture even though they do not or cannot speak Welsh. There are other group bonds that may be more important to form an ethnic identity than language (Wellros 1998). However, it is maintained by Edwards and Chrisholm (1987) that the possession and use of an original group language promotes solidarity even though it is a feature of group continuity. Panharipade (1992:261) argues that 'the loss of one identity marker does not automatically entail the loss of cultural identity' and in addition, 'the loss of one or more identity markers tends to reinforce the remaining identity markers' (ibid.).

However, a number of researchers have severely criticised Edward's standpoints. Fishman (1989:674) says that ethnic identity can survive language loss but that this loss will 'exact a huge price in terms of ethnocultural authenticity and continuity'. Also Thornborrow (2000) argues that loss of a language can be associated with loss of cultural identity. Lange & Westin (1991) argue that a language can function as an ethnic marker in two different ways. It identifies people with their own language group as well as distinguishes foreigners. Fishman (1989) sees language as the symbol *par excellence* of ethnicity. He concludes that:

[L]anguage shift, or loss of a culture's intimately associated language, is indicative of fargoing culture change, at the very least, and possibly, of cultural dislocation and destruction, even though a sense of ethnocultural identity may, nevertheless, remain, at a conscious or unconscious attitudinal level (Fishman *et al.* 1985:xi)

In a study of language contact and language shift among different generations of Japanese immigrants in Brazil it was found that identity switch is accompanied by mother tongue replacement by Portuguese by the third generation (Kanazawa and Loveday 1988). Lewis (1980) states that language is not a mean of symbolising a culture or a component of it, it is an indispensable element of that culture. Harding and Riley (1986) go on to say that consciously or unconsciously we acquire most aspects of culture by living in a particular society and most of them are related to language to a certain extent. Also Lange & Westin (1981) point out that the individual's primary socialisation takes place in the context of language and through the language he/she learns behavioural norms and patterns to interpret other people's actions. Group feelings are reinforced by using the group's own language as well as cultural norms, and values are transmitted by a group's language and it marks a boundary line to other groups (Giles *et al* 1977, Wellros 1998). Thornborrow writes that 'identifying yourself as belonging to a particular group or community often means adopting the linguistic conventions of that group' (Thornborrow 2000:136).

Furthermore, Kasimati (1984) argues that language and sociocultural values are very important components of cultural identity. Gonzalez (1993:21) claims that 'language is a necessary component of culture and one's identity; it is a vehicle of one's deepest thoughts and expression and one's identity as a person'. According to Holmes (1992), a language that is considered an important symbol of ethnic identity has more chance of maintenance.

2.5 Language and education

Education has always been an important concept among the Mennonites. Already from the beginning of the Mennonite history the churches taught adults, youths and children to read the Bible and soon, they established their own schools. It is said that 'where the Mennonites settle down the first thing they do is to build a school' (Dyck 2002:9 my translation). Dyck (2002) writes that while in the 16th to the 18th century the general public did not know to read since public schools did not exist and reading was a privilege of the aristocrats and the leaders of the church, among the Mennonites illiteracy was unknown.

Paraguay had given special rights to the Mennonites concerning their education to decide what to teach and how to teach it. However, Dyck (2002) writes that as time passed, the colonies came to the conclusion, without any pressure from the state, that it was essential to adapt the educational programs to the national educational plans so that the youths could continue to higher education. The teaching is in a bilingual system, German and Spanish, increasing the percentage of teaching in Spanish with the level of education.

Kostoulas-Makrakis (1995:27) writes 'despite the different opinions regarding language and ethnic identity, language plays a central role for self-identification'. The self-identification can be significantly influenced by schooling both in its formal and non-formal as well as its informal modes. As van der Stoel (1997) writes 'education is a very important element for the preservation and the deepening of the identity of persons' belonging to a national minority'. The family and the school also play an important role for the formation of beliefs, which in turn will affect mother tongue learning and maintenance (Landry and Allard 1991, Allard and Landry 1992). Singh (2000:84) claims that an individual can have more than one ethnic label, ranging from those they choose to those that are decided for them. The speaker may also choose to identify himself/herself with different groups at different times and may then use language as a tool in doing this (Thornborrow 2000).

Fishman (1989) argues that education is engaged in sociocultural socialisation. The educational system is then a culture-and identity-creating institution. As Dyck (2002) points out, the overall aim of the education in Mennonite schools in Paraguay is that the education should be a preparation for the entire life, in all areas; spiritual, moral, practical, relationships between people and with the environment etc. Ekstrand (1982) states that any school system should prepare the young for the society and culture of that particular culture. A bilingual school system must also prepare the bicultural children for two cultures and teach them both languages (ibid.).

Hyltenstam (2004:) claims that the only well-functioning bilingual school system is the immersion education. The children are from the beginning taught in their mother tongue and are gradually introduced to the foreign language. Hyltenstam writes that there are six characteristics of an immersion education

- The mother tongue of the pupils has higher status than the language of tuition.
- All pupils have the same mother tongue
- The teachers understand the pupils' mother tongue
- No pupils have the tuition language as their mother tongue
- The mother tongue proficiency has developed to a certain level when the tuition in another language starts.
- Literacy in the mother tongue is also expected.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) writes about another type of bilingual education: assimilationist submersion education where minorities are taught through the medium of dominant languages only and not in their mother tongue of the minority. She claims that this type of bilingual education 'causes mental harm' and that it also leads the students to using the dominant language with their own children later on, i.e. over a generation or two the children are linguistically, and often in other ways too, forcibly transferred to a dominant group. Lockheed and Verspoor (in Brock-Utne (2000:10) state that

children who speak a language other than the language of instruction confront a substantial barrier to learning /.../ not speaking the language of instruction can make the difference between succeeding and failing in school, between remaining in school and dropping out

Wedin (2004) and Brock-Utne (2002) emphasises the importance of the proficiency level of the teachers in the language of tuition. In their studies in Tanzania where the language of tuition is English and Swahili and not in the mother tongue of pupils, both found that the levels of English were too low in most schools for effective learning to take place.

It has been found that two of the best-established motivation sources associated with learning a second language are instrumental and integrative (Gardner and Lambert 1972). Instrumentally motivated persons preserve a minority language mainly for its utilitarian value, for status reasons or personal success *etc.*, and integratively motivated persons preserve the language in order to be accepted members of the target language group, to share the culture of that group (Gardner and Lambert 1972, Baker 1992). Baker (1992) argues that these two kinds of motivation can co-exist in an individual at the same time and are not necessarily opposites. However, the fear of revealing an 'inferior' origin of antipathy to one's immigrant background may be a reason for failure to learn a language (Haugen 1978).

It is also argued that the perceived value of the language is important for its survival. Tandefelt (1992) has in her study seen that if parents estimate the value of the minority language to be low, then their motivation to transmit it to the next generation is weak. Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) writes that 'a language is threatened if it has few users and a weak political status, and, especially, if children are no longer learning it, i.e. when the language is no longer transmitted to the next generation'. A study of five Japanese immigrant families residing in Toronto, Ontario is reported by Sakamoto (2001), who identifies family bonding as the most important reason for language maintenance. Other factors include the availability of school programs, access to technology and resources, availability of ethnic language caregivers and informed teachers. Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) writes that 'if there are no minority teachers in the pre-schools/schools and if the minority languages are not used as the main media of education, the use of these languages is indirectly prohibited in daily intercourse/in the school, i.e. it is a question of linguistic genocide'.

There are some schools that directly prohibit the use of other languages than the language of education. Wedin (2004) writes about schools in Tanzania where a rule about language use in school was written on the board in every headmaster's office. No language was supposed to be used in school except Swahili and English. This can be compared with the Mennonite schools in Chaco where the students were forbidden to speak Plattdeutsch at school, even in breaks. Violating this rule resulted in punishments such as watering all the plants in the school etc.

Also García (2003) points out that when speaking the ethnic language at home is coupled with schooling that pays no attention to teaching and reading in the ethnic home language the productive skills in the language are severely limited. Schubert (1986) points at how institutions – other than the school – found in the larger society influence schooling. With the realisation of the importance of external cultural agencies on curriculum implementation, it becomes necessary for curriculum inquirers to step out of the schooling realm in order to understand precisely what takes place inside the school and class.

2.6 Mennonites and language

There is an estimated number of about 38,000 first language speakers of Plattdeutsch, also called Low German, in Paraguay, including 19,000 who speak both Plattdeutsch and Standard German as their mother tongue (SIL International 2004). There are several ways of spelling the dialect (plautdeutsch, plautdeutsch, etc). I have chosen to use Plattdeutsch which is used in Stoesz and Stackley (2000). The first Mennonites from Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands had already started to use forms of Low German as lingua franca before moving to West-Prussia (Nieuweboer 1998:9). Because of emigration Plattdeutsch has not remained a static language. It has been influenced by the surrounding languages and words from for example Dutch, Russian, English and Spanish have been assimilated into the language. The Plattdeutsch spoken among Mennonites in Paraguay differs therefore from one colony to the other. However, in spite of the difference, the different groups can understand each other very well, even colonies that have lived separately for hundreds of years.

Nieuweboer (1998) has studied the Altai dialect of Plautdiitsch (the Russian version of Plattdeutsch) in West Siberia. He gives a detailed description of the phoneme system as well as the grammar of the dialect. He also discusses Plautdiitsch in contact with other languages and how it has been influenced by these. The Plattdeutsch in Paraguay has more or less gone through similar language contact and is still doing so today. The language is very much influenced by the languages that it has been in contact with. And the Plattdeutsch in the Menno colony includes a lot of English words in its grammar. Nieuweboer's discussion about the Altai dialect is therefore relevant for the language situation in Paraguay as well.

A situation of language contact arises when two or more languages are used by one and the same speaker or group of speakers (Nieuweboer 1998:188). The question is who uses what language in what situations and for what reasons. A number of linguistic and extralinguistic factors decide the influence languages have on each other in a contact language situation. For example the duration and intensity of the contacts between groups who use the languages, the relative number of speakers, the social (in)equality of the groups and the prestige of each language in both groups (Nieuweboer 1998:188). He further writes that loans from Standard German in Plautdiitsch (the West-Siberian Mennonite Low German) are far less abundant than loans from Russian. The loans from Standard German that do exist tend to be confined to certain semantical fields such as religion. However, because of its close genetic relationship to Standard German and the fact that its phonological shape is not untypical of Plautdiitsch, loans from Standard German may not be recognised as loans (Nieuweboer 1998:189).

For a long time among Mennonites, Standard German has been the language of church, school and other official institutions while Plattdeutsch has been that of family life (Wiens 1999). Standard German and Plattdeutsch served as High and Low Varieties in a diglossia situation where they have been used in strictly separated domains (Ferguson 1959). The

Menno colony is an oral community where many contracts are made orally in Plattdeutsch instead of being written down in German. Both Plattdeutsch and Standard German have been strongly tied to the identity of the Mennonite colony and appear to function as a mark of separation towards surrounding cultures. As Ofstad (1981) argues, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that a minority group's customs, norms, values, and language, are among the most important and fundamental criteria of identity.

Recently, however, the situation has begun to change in the Mennonite colonies of Chaco. Although German and Plattdeutsch are still the dominant languages, some modern-minded parents do not speak Plattdeutsch with their children. This is seen especially in Asuncion where some youths cannot even speak German fluently. Spanish is winning more and more ground, even in the colonies and it is quickly replacing German as the language of choice in town shops. However, German is still used in church As Singh (2000) writes, language is used as a marker of ethnic identity and creates a sense of 'us' and 'them'. She says that 'using the language of the wider community can be seen as denial or even betrayal of cultural identity' (Singh 2000:94). The language of the wider community is in this case Spanish. Dyck (1993) writes that to the Mennonites in Manitoba, Canada (the group who later formed the Menno colony in Paraguay) the loss of German would mean a gradual loss of their Mennonite faith and culture through assimilation into the Canadian environment (322). The language therefore seems to be very tied to the culture and their faith. Fishman (1992:401), referring to the language-ethnicity-religion complex, notes that:

[N]o one of these three constituents of 'authenticity' is itself sufficient for language maintenance. They all change in power, at different rates, as the flow of available meaningful rewards changes and depending on whether prior consciousness of ethnic-religious-linguistic boundaries has occurred.

Thornborrow (2000:149) concludes that 'the relationship between language and identity will always involve a complex mix of individual, social and political factors which work to construct people as belonging to a social group, or to exclude them from it'

Thornborrow (2000) also brings up the subject of names and naming practices in relationship to identity. The name that is given to an individual sets that individual apart from others. As expressed by the Zambian writer Felly Nkweto Simmonds: 'My name locates me in time and space. It gives me a sense of my own history that I not only share specifically with a generation of people in Africa but also with all Africans in the Diaspora' (Nkweto Simmonds 1998:36). Giving names of German origin separates the Mennonites from the majority population in Paraguay who have Spanish names and adds to the feeling of group belonging.

3 Method

3.1 Introduction

Hermeneutics is a scientific method where people's experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions are studied and interpreted (Patel & Davidson 1994). However, Thurén (1991) argues that one of the weak points with hermeneutics is that it is difficult to know if the researcher has interpreted a person's feeling correctly. He further argues that it is not possible to test feelings and experiences. Hermeneutics is about seeing the overall picture and change between the overall picture and details in order to reach a high level of understanding (Patel &

Davidson 1994). The researcher's previous knowledge about the subject is no obstacle in hermeneutics but is seen as an asset that the researcher ought to use. The method is seen as 'open, 'subjective' and engaging' (Patel & Davidson 1994:26)

A hermeneutic outlook is often used in qualitative studies in order to understand and interpret different situations of general character (Patel & Davidson 1994) The qualitative perspective, in comparison with a quantitative perspective, looks more to the individual and how he/she sees, interprets and constructs the world around him/her. In contrast to the traditional perspective, the qualitative perspective sees the individual as a part of a subjective environment and not an onlooker or observer of a more or less objective world. The individual is studied in real-life situations and not in artificial laboratory situations. In qualitative studies the research is therefore closer to the individual and forms a subject-subject relationship. (Backman 1998:47-48)

A qualitative study often works with questions that can be described but neither graded nor measured. It is about people's experiences and feelings while the quantitative study often treats statistics that are presented in diagrams and tables. Several scholars have argued that quantitative and qualitative approaches have complementary strengths and that quantitative approaches alone do not give the whole picture (Schofield and Anderson 1987, Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991). The present study will include both parts that can be presented in diagrams and tables and parts that cannot. However, there will not be enough data for statistics. What I expect to do is to be able to show a tendency.

This study aims to understand the situation the life of a group of people, namely the language situation of Mennonites in Paraguay, on a deeper level, which is in accordance with the theory of hermeneutics (Wallén 1996).

3.2 Description of information sources

The information was obtained in three different ways: observations, key informants and interviews. I have chosen three sources in order to get a more complete picture of the language situation.

3.2.1 Description of observation method

The observations were performed by myself. I have stayed among Mennonites for about 2.5 months and listened to conversations with the intention of hearing what language they speak with each other and when. I have observed conversation patterns while spending time with different people. The observations have not been organised but carried out when there has been an opportunity to observe. According to the Hermeneutic method, the individuals were then studied in real-life situations. The people observed were not the same people as were interviewed. Notes were taken after observations.

3.2.2 Description of key informants

The key informants are people with life experience. They are part of the Mennonite community and have positions that give them an insight in the language situation among Mennonites in Asuncion and the Menno colony. They were chosen because of their

knowledge about the theme investigated and their positions which give them total insight into school language policy issues, on one hand in Asuncion and on the other hand in Chaco.

The interviews with the key informants had a low degree of standardisation which means that the questions were adapted to the person who was interviewed and the answers he/she had given (Patel & Davidson 1994). There were no ready questions but a discussion about the theme and the future of the Mennonites, the colony and the languages in Paraguay. The key informants gave a much wider picture of the language situation and gave a lot of interesting insights that complemented the interviews made with the eight women of Mennonite origin.

3.2.3 Description of interviewees

The informants are four women aged around 60 and four women at the age of about 30. All of the eight women were born in Paraguay. They have at least one child and are married to a man of Mennonite origin. Two of the women from each age group are from Asunción. The women from Asunción were all born in the Menno Colony. They were either born there or their parents were born there. Two of the women from each age group are from Chaco and the Menno colony. All the eight women were volunteers and did not receive any payment for their participation.

In order to keep the interviewees anonymous I will use the following abbreviations when referring to the women when presenting my results. The abbreviations are according to their place of residence, Asunción – A, the Menno colony in Chaco – M.

- A1 Around 60 years old, housewife, educational level: 6 years (primary school), has lived about 35 years in Asuncion.
- A2 Around 60, housewife, educational level: 6 years, has lived about 35 years in Asuncion.
- A3 Around 35, housewife, educational level: 12 years (primary, secondary school and upper secondary school), has lived about 10 years in Asuncion.
- A4 Around 35, working outside home, educational level: 12 years + 6 years university studies, has lived about 14 years in Asuncion.

- M1 Around 60, working outside home, educational level: 9 years + 2 years vocational training, has lived a few years abroad.
- M2 Around 60, housewife, educational level: 6 years + 2 years vocational training, has lived all her life in the Menno colony.
- M3 Around 35, housewife, educational level: 10 years + 1 year of vocational training, has lived all her life in the colony.
- M4 Around 35, housewife, educational level 6 years + 1 year of vocational training, has lived all her live (except for 5 years in another colony) in the Menno colony.

The choice of the target group to be investigated was based on the following considerations. First, the group of informants consists of women only since according to Trudgill (1974) women are more sensitive to the social implications of language variation. Second, since they have children they have thought about the question of which language to speak when and to whom and then made a choice of what language to transmit to their children. However, we should keep in mind that parents' influence on their children's language attitudes has weakened nowadays whereas other socialisation institutions such as peer groups and the mass media have increased their influence (Baker 1992). But looking at parent's attitudes towards

language can give an indication of in what direction the language situation among Mennonites in Paraguay is heading.

3.2.4 Description of sampling procedures

The informants in Asunción were chosen with the help of locals in Asunción. Their origin as well as their age and the existence of children were taken in consideration. From the names that were given to me I randomly chose two names from each age group. The informants from the Menno colony were chosen in the same way.

As Patel & Davidson (1994) argues, the informants do not always see the benefit of participating in the study and it is therefore important to motivate the informants and awaken an interest for the study by demonstrating the aim of the study. In the case of this study, the informants' participation will indicate the future of a language that has been a crucial part of their culture for a very long time. Their participation will help linguistics and the Mennonite community to take action. This was explained to them and they agreed to take part.

A major and common method for observing language attitudes involves the use of series of direct questions. They can either be presented in the form of questionnaires addressed to large groups or in individual interviews (Boyd 1985, Larsen, Freeman and Long 1991, Marley 1993). Rather than on-going studies, which repeatedly study a population over a period of time, the present study belongs to what Lieberson (1980:12) calls 'one-shot affairs'.

One part of the data in this study consists of interviews based on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was not showed to the interviewee but used as a base for the interview questions. In order to avoid any language and culture misunderstandings caused by the questions, the questionnaire went through several stages of development before reaching its final form (see Appendix). Its content was subjected to scrutiny (content validity) by a number of teachers and Mennonite representatives. The original questionnaire in English was translated into Spanish since all interviewees were assumed to have a rather good level of Spanish. The accuracy of this translation was verified by means of a back-translation made by a bilingual person. The data was collected from October 2004 to January 2005 and the subjects were informed about the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers.

The questionnaire was tested in a pilot interview performed with an interviewee that met the criteria set up for the interviewees. The pilot interview was made in order to see if any questions would be offensive or misunderstood. After the pilot interview the questionnaire was revised.

Six interviews were made in Spanish, one in English (the interviewee preferred English to Spanish) and one in Plattdeutsch with interpreter. At two of the interviews an interpreter was available in case of language problems, however it was not needed. In one of the interviews made in Spanish an interpreter would have been needed, however there was no interpreter available.

3.2.5 Description of instruments

A semi-structured questionnaire of 32 items was developed for the present study by the present author. Some of the questions were adapted from similar studies (see Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995 and Adolf Sawatsky 1996)

The questionnaire was produced in two versions where one was adapted for the informants in Asunción and the other one for the informants in the Menno Colony. The questionnaire was used in interviews with the informants. The alternatives that were put in the questionnaire were usually not mentioned or showed to the interviewee but used as a support for the interviewer in case the interviewee could not think of an answer. In interviews, the interview results can be correlated highly with participant observation or interviews (Boyd 1985). Using the questionnaire in interviews I was able to go deeper and look for reasons to the answers given by the interviewees than if I had just given them the questionnaire.

The interview had a low degree of standardisation. The following-up questions depended on the interviewees' answers. The informants could choose between several alternatives if they found it hard to think of alternatives of their own. They were then asked to explain the reasons for their answers in their own words. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to one hour each and they were recorded on a tape recorder, while at the same time the author was taking notes.

The questions were divided into seven different areas concerning the family milieu, socio-institutional milieu, attitudes, ethnolinguistic identification, perceived ethnolinguistic status, language behaviour and perceived proficiency (Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995). The interview started and ended with questions of a more neutral character while in between them were questions which asked for the informants' opinions and attitudes.

1. In the context of the family milieu, information about place of birth was asked for (4). A second question dealt with the number of years the informant had lived in Asunción and Chaco, the Menno colony, respectively (5). They were asked about their level of education (7) as well as their present occupation (6).

The informants in Asunción were asked if they were planning to move to Chaco in the future and informants in the Chaco were asked if they were planning to move to Asunción (10). The women around 60 were asked if they had had any plans to move during the time they raised their children. Previous studies have shown that language maintenance is associated with the family's plans to return to the country of origin (Conklin and Lourie 1983; Pavlinic-Wolf et al. 1988), in this case return to the Menno colony or plans to leave it. They were asked to write the names of their children (3). The reason for this was to see if they have given their children names of Spanish or German origin. The naming practise may reflect their attitude towards the use of Spanish in their everyday life.

2. Contacts in the socio-institutional milieu were measured by six questions. The first question dealt with the frequency of visits to Chaco or Asunción respectively (8), followed by an open-ended question concerning the aim of the trips (9). The third question dealt with residential concentration (12), the fourth question requested information on participation in ethnic associations (11) and fifth question concerned the ethnic background of most of the informants' friends (13). A question asking with whom they would feel more comfortable (from what culture) was taken away after the pilot interview. It was difficult for the interviewee to understand it and it might be offensive.

3. Attitudes. Baker (1992:11) argues that 'attitudes are a convenient and efficient way of explaining consistent patterns in behaviour. Attitudes often manage to summarize, explain and predict behaviour'. One question dealt with language preference, what language the informants preferred to use over the other (25). The last five questions concerned their own language experience (15, 16) preference of language of their children (17, 18) and marriage partners for their children (24).

4. Ethnolinguistic identification. The subjects were asked to identify their 'own' language (14) and their ethnic identity (20) as well as giving an explanation of what defines a Mennonite (19).

5. Perceived ethnolinguistic status. The informants were asked to answer three questions dealing with Mennonites in Paraguay, their status (21, 23) as well as the status of Plattdeutsch in Paraguay and internationally (26, 32).

6. The language behaviour items included language use in different domains (27). I have concentrated on some of the different domains recommended by Schmidt-Rohr (1963) with some adaptation to the present study: the family, the street, the job (subdivided into language of instruction and language of recess and entertainment) and the church. The domains literature and the press will be reported in this study as well, however they were not used in the interviews. Schmidt-Rohr also recommends domains that are not applicable for this study: the military, the courts and the governmental administration. Fishman (1965) suggests that domains such as these help us to understand that language choice and topic are related to widespread socio-cultural norms and expectations and language choices become transformed into the processes of language maintenance or language shift.

7. Perceived proficiency was measured by four questions. Informants rated their ability in speaking, writing and understanding oral and written language in German, Guaraní, Spanish, Plattdeutsch and English (28). The three final questions dealt with the informants' confidence in their speaking skills in Plattdeutsch, German and Spanish as well as reporting situations where they experience difficulties in using the three languages (29, 30, 31).

3.3 Method considerations

There are many factors that contribute to making an interview a success. One is awareness of differences in culture. As Hofstede (2002:160) writes 'even a well-intentioned interviewer can cause the interview to fail if he or she has no appreciation for the communication preferences of the client. Some communication behaviours are appropriate in all cultures, but many are not'. It is therefore important to inform oneself as much as possible about the culture before making the interview. Hofstede presents ten different syntactic cultures, namely cultures characterized by: individualism, collectivism, high power distance, low power distance, masculinity, femininity, uncertainty avoidance, uncertainty tolerance, long-term orientation and short-term orientation. These syntactic cultures are extremes. However they give some indication of the different ways of thinking in different cultures and are a great help to understand others. Studying the syntactic cultures gives insight into one's own culture and way of thinking as well as raising awareness of how to discern and respect differences in culture. Interviewing that ignores the cultural context is unlikely to be accurate and appropriate. However, as Hofstede points out as well, it is important to remember that not all behaviours can be explained through culture and that there are always many factors in addition to culture that affect the outcome of a course of events.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

This study has followed the guidelines set up by Vetenskapsrådet (1990). It is important to protect the individual when performing studies like this. Therefore the interviewees were informed about the study, their part of it and on what conditions they participated. However the information had to be given so that it did not affect the results of the study i.e. provoke a change in attitude towards the different languages because of group solidarity. The informants were told that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to discontinue it at any time.

If ethically sensitive matters or controversial interpretations arise, the informants will be allowed to read and approve the essay before publication. I have also offered informants and others involved in the study a copy of the essay when it is finished.

An important rule is to conceal the identity of the informants, especially since the study and interviews were performed in such a small community as the Mennonites in Paraguay. I am aware of the fact that the informants might easily be identified by others even though I do not mention their names. I have therefore decided not to describe the interviewees in detail but to give a brief description in order to make sure not to include any details that can lead to identification. I have also taken the Mennonite society into consideration and made sure that individuals and the colony itself will not be harmed or affected negatively by anything I write.

4 Results

4.1 Comparison of the use of different languages in Asuncion and in the Menno colony

4.1.1 The school

Some teachers in Asuncion believe that the pupils who go to the Mennonite school in Asuncion speak a more correct German than in the Menno colony because there are several teachers from Germany, while in the Menno colony there are Paraguayan Mennonite teachers who speak an 'old' German. However, some teachers in the colony expressed that they believe that the pupils in Asuncion speak a worse German than in the colony because they mix their German with a lot with Spanish.

The children in Asuncion start using Spanish from early childhood. At school, the majority of the pupils speak German or Spanish with each other in breaks. One of the principles at the school is that teachers who can speak German always speak German to the students. This is important in order to give the students many opportunities to practice the language. Outside school they also use German or Spanish. One of the key informants stated that some pupils feel more comfortable speaking Spanish than German. In the Menno colony on the other hand, the majority of the pupils speak Plattdeutsch with each other in breaks. Many pupils learn German when they start school and they start studying Spanish in the second grade. However, this depends from school to school.

The knowledge of Spanish among the teachers also varies in Asuncion and in the Chaco. The teachers in Asuncion are daily encountered with Spanish and they therefore have a good command of the language. In the Menno colony the opportunities to hear and speak Spanish

are fewer and the teachers may therefore have a lower command of Spanish than the teachers in Asuncion.

One of the schools that the Mennonite children in Asuncion attend is a bilingual school that teaches in German and Spanish. However, it is not a 'classical' bilingual school, as one of the key informants said, where an equal amount of subjects are taught in the different languages. At pre-school German is the dominant language. Then at school, German is taught as a subject throughout the years. When the children start primary school they have 8 hours of German. The number of hours decreases with the years and in the last three years (year 10-12) the pupils take 5 hours of German a week. In primary school, Music, Art, Mathematics and Christian education is taught through the medium of German while in Secondary school Christian education is taught in Spanish, the other subjects continue to be taught in German. The reason for the change in language in Christian Education is for the pupils to get used to the terminology in Spanish so that they, without any problems, can continue studies in theology after finishing Upper Secondary School.

The main reason for teaching Art and Music in German is to increase the students' vocabulary. The pressure of speaking German perfectly is decreased since singing a song in German does not mean that one has to fully understand every word. This is an opportunity for the students who do not speak German very well to have a natural German environment where they can practice the language in a more relaxed way. Mathematics is taught in German because the teachers like the method that is used in the German material and they have not found texts in Spanish with this teaching method.

German is taught through the medium of German (compare with Mennonites in the Altai region, Russia, where Standard German is taught through the medium of Russian, and most students therefore end up speaking a highly Russianised form of Standard German (Nieuweboer 1998:191)). The German classes are divided into two groups: *Muttersprache* (mother tongue) for the students who speak German at home and *Fremdsprache* (foreign language) for the students who learn German as a foreign language. Both groups take an exam that gives them the possibility to go to university in Germany. About 80-90 per cent of the group of *Fremdsprache* pass the test.

4.1.2 The community

The use and availability of different languages influences a potential language shift. In Asuncion many young people speak Spanish with each other. Some speak German at home with their parents but outside home they speak Spanish. Many of them feel more comfortable speaking Spanish than speaking German. Plattdeutsch is hardly spoken at all, especially if the person is born in Asuncion. However, young people who spend a limited period of time in Asuncion (for reasons of study) and are not planning to stay there often speak dialect with each other. However, in church and after church German and Spanish are heard. There are many people in the church who do not speak Plattdeutsch and German is then used in order for everybody to understand. The Mennonites in Asuncion are surrounded by Spanish speakers and Spanish is therefore a part of everybody's every day life.

In the Menno colony, it is not common to hear young people speak Spanish to each other but the majority speak Plattdeutsch. However, more and more people of other cultural background than the Mennonites can be seen on the streets. This is the place where Mennonite youths meet youths of other cultural origins. People of different language

backgrounds (i.e. the indigenous languages that exist around the Mennonite colonies) meet and in order to communicate, Spanish is used. Through the use of Spanish, relationships between Mennonites and people of other cultural backgrounds are formed. However, in the villages around Loma Plata, Spanish is not spoken as a language of communication but is learned at school. There are fewer opportunities to practice the language than in the town. And in general, the proficiency level of Spanish is lower in the villages than in the town. However, since many farmers hire workers of other than Mennonite background they as well are forced to learn Spanish.

In addition, some parents in Asuncion own their own business and their clients are often Latin Americans. Their circle of friends therefore includes more Latin Americans than in the colonies where people mainly spend time with friends of Mennonite origin.

4.1.3 Supermarkets

Since Asuncion has a mixture of many cultures the language of the supermarkets is Spanish. In contrast, in the supermarket owned by the Co-operative in the Menno colony, the main languages are Plattdeutsch and German, however signs are available in Spanish as well since a large number of their customers speak only Spanish.

4.1.4 Code-switching

I have noticed a high level of code-switching (for a discussion of code-switching see Myers-Scotton 1988) among the Mennonites in Asuncion. There are several motivations for borrowing, for example the referential nature, i.e. new objects and notions can be introduced together with their name. This is sometimes referred to as the filling of a lexical gap (Nieuweboer 1988). Finer distinctions can be made when a loan does not replace an existing word but is used in a specific meaning. While listening to conversations in Plattdeutsch in Asuncion I have heard several words in Spanish. For example talking about university studies the Spanish word *compañeros* was used to refer to classmates. Other commonly used Spanish words are *listo* (ok), *dale* (ok) and *hola* (hallo). The latter are also common among Mennonites in the Menno colony, however not as frequent as in Asuncion.

4.1.5 Cinema

The cinema is another factor that encourages language use by offering films in different languages to the public. In Asuncion there are several cinemas that show films in Spanish and English (with subtitles). Many Mennonites go to the cinema and then hear and/or read a lot of Spanish. So far in the colonies in the Chaco, there is no cinema. However, there are some small stores where the public can rent videos and more and more people have television sets.

4.1.6 Literature

The language of written literature also differs between Asuncion and the Menno colony. In Asuncion, a large number of books, newspapers and magazines are available to the public, mainly in Spanish but also in other languages. Books are widely available in bookstores and libraries.

The Mennonites are traditionally an oral community. Only a minority read a daily newspaper. There is a monthly magazine with information and articles from the colony that the majority

of the people read. However, since Plattdeutsch has been the language spoken in the family there is no tradition of reading books. Especially since the children do not understand German and would therefore not understand the text read to them. The books in the bookstore are all in German with some few exceptions in Spanish. However, the German books are very expensive. There is a small library with books in German and a few in English.

4.1.7 Domains

The women were asked to give a picture of their language use in different domains. The results are presented in figure 1 below, sorted according to place of residence (Chaco or Asuncion) and languages:

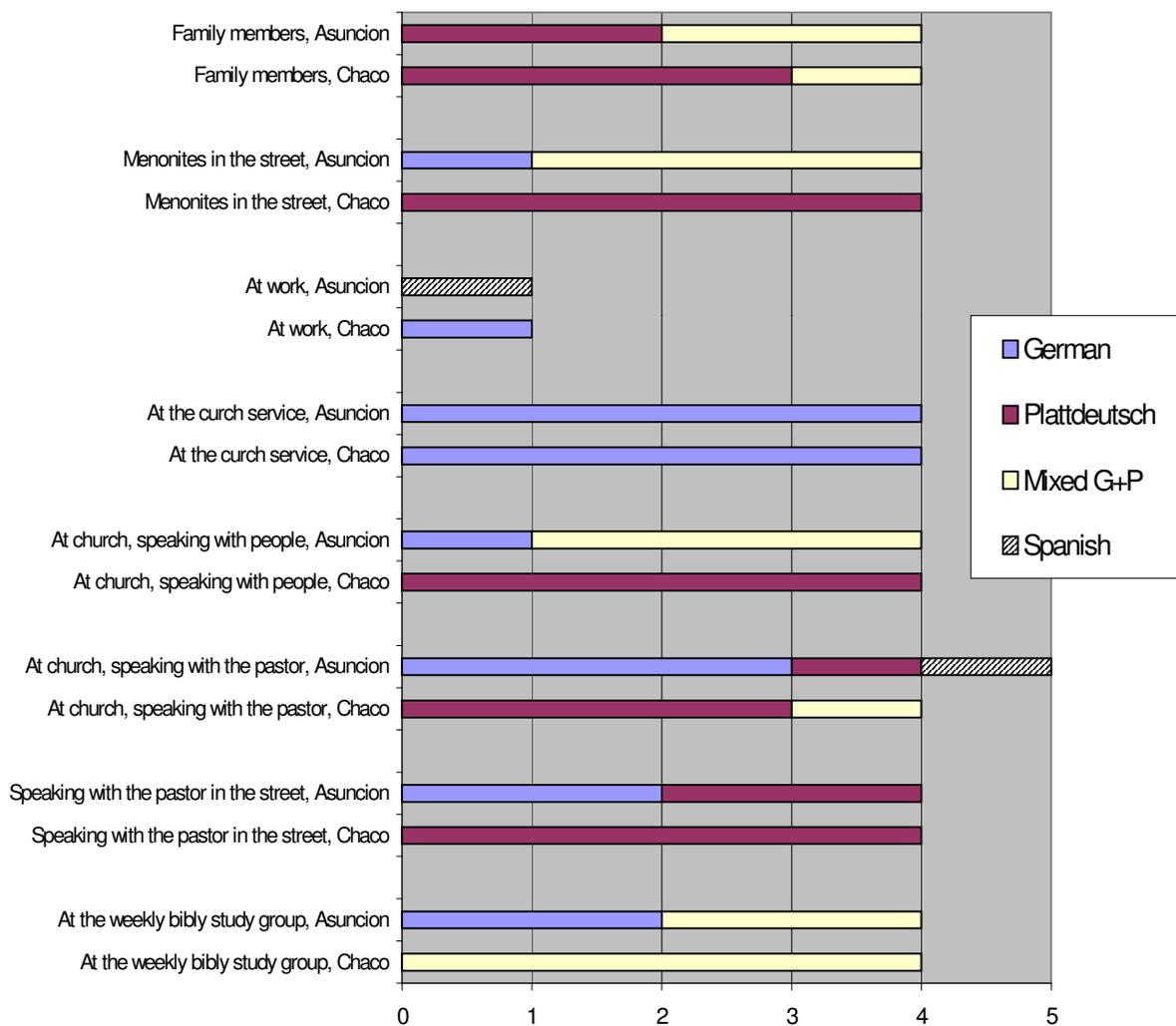


Fig 1. Language use according to domains and place of residence.

In the diagram it can be seen that the majority of the women interviewed speak Plattdeutsch to family members. Three of the women mix German and Plattdeutsch speaking German to their children and Plattdeutsch to their husbands.

When speaking to Mennonites in the streets the women in the Menno colony said that they always speak in dialect. If the person is unknown they start speaking in dialect and then

switch to German. The greeting shows if the person is Plattdeutsch-speaker or not. In Asuncion, the women said that they speak German to most Mennonites. If they know that the person speaks Plattdeutsch then they speak that. But if the person is unknown, they greet the person in German (or Spanish). Mayers-Scotton (1988) talks about marked and unmarked choices. In this case a marked choice would be to speak German to a Plattdeutsch speaker. One of the interviewees recognises this by saying that when she speaks German to a person she does not feel as close to that person as when she speaks Plattdeutsch with him or her. She also says that when she meets a new person and does not want a close relationship with him or her she speaks German with that person. It is more polite, and being polite marks social distance.

Only two of the women work professionally. The woman from Asuncion stated that she uses German, Spanish and English every day at work. The woman from the Menno colony said that the use of German at her workplace was imposed from the leadership of her workplace.

At church, both in the Menno colony and in Asuncion, German is the dominant language. The pastors generally speak in German when preaching or leading the service. Some people sometimes speak Plattdeutsch at the service, but it is far from common. In Asuncion some services are in Spanish. Interpretation into Spanish is almost always available. When speaking to the pastor after the service, the majority in Asuncion speak German. They said that if they can they speak German and when the subject is too difficult they switch to dialect. One reason for speaking German is that some of the pastors do not speak Plattdeutsch. The informant from Chaco who speaks German to the pastor said that the pastor was well-educated and therefore she speaks German to him. One informant said that she speaks Plattdeutsch to the pastor, but that is because she knew that the pastor speaks the dialect as well as German. In Chaco the majority stated that they speak Plattdeutsch to their pastors. When speaking to the pastor in another place, two of the women in Asuncion said that they speak German to the pastors. The reason was the same as above. One women in the Menno colony said that it is common to just greet the pastor in the street and not to have a conversation with him since people then might think that the person has a problem.

When speaking to people at the church the four women in the Menno colony use Plattdeutsch. However, the conversations after church seem to be limited to short greetings. In Asuncion on the other hand, people stay for coffee after the service. The informants said that they usually use German since many people only speak German or Spanish, but with people they know speak Plattdeutsch, they speak the dialect. At the weekly bible study group both German and Plattdeutsch are used. In two of the groups German is spoken because some of the members were not Plattdeutsch speakers. In the other groups, dialect was often used in conversations, but when reading the bible or using study material, German was used. Some people prayed in Plattdeutsch, but the majority in the group prayed in German.

4.1.8 Proficiency level

The informants were asked to estimate their proficiency level in the German, Plattdeutsch, Spanish, Guaraní and English, when speaking, listening, writing and reading. The results for Guaraní and English are not presented in the graph below since they are not relevant for the present study. They were included to see if the informants were familiar with more than the three languages in question. It can be noted though that all informants estimated their proficiency level to be very low in Guaraní which is the second official language in Paraguay. The results have been given grades: *very poor* -1, *poor* 0, *good* 1 and *very good* 2. The results

on the four skills in each language were summarized and this resulted in a number between 0 and 8 for each language. The results for the informants in Asuncion and Chaco were then added together and are presented in Fig 2 below.

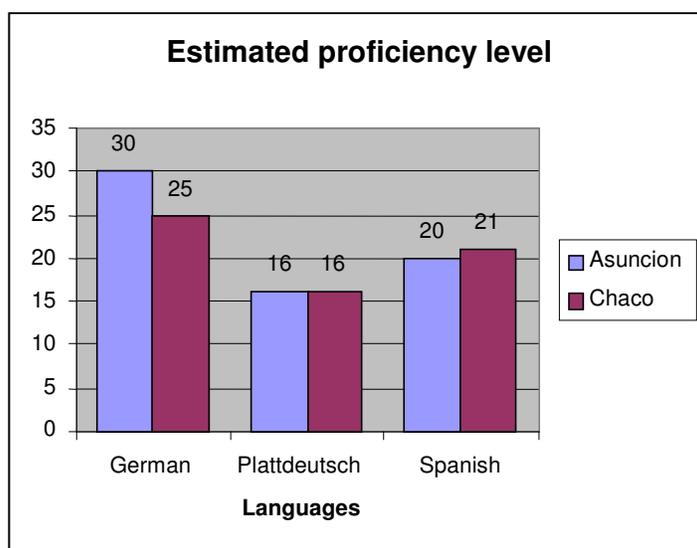


Fig. 2. Informants estimated proficiency level of German, Plattdeutsch and Spanish.

All informants estimated their proficiency levels in the skills speaking and listening in Plattdeutsch as very high (very good). However, none of the women had ever written a text in Plattdeutsch and only one had read one. They all pointed out that Plattdeutsch (their version of Plattdeutsch) does not exist as a written language. The emphasis in the language is on the oral part. That is the reason why the column for Plattdeutsch is lower than those for German and Spanish. However, they all expressed that they felt completely comfortable speaking Plattdeutsch and could not think of any circumstances where their language level was not high enough.

In the two groups of women there were two women whose results in Spanish differed from the other results. In Asuncion one of the women of the older generation felt that her Spanish was not good and her total on the skills was 2. This was also noticeable in the interview where a translator would have made the interview go smoother. Sawatsky (1996:92) writes concerning this situation that 'when immigrating to Paraguay the colonisers refused to learn the national language. Today, after 70 years of residence in Paraguay, a minority of the adults speak Spanish fluently' (my translation). In the Menno colony one of the women estimated her proficiency level high and that gave her a total of 8. She uses the languages at work. However, even though she estimated her proficiency level very high, she still expressed that she feels very insecure when speaking Spanish.

4.2 Identification of the degree of importance that parents of young children and parents of adult children give to Plattdeutsch and other languages

4.2.1 Language spoken to the children

Three of the eight women interviewed speak German to their children. Two of the women were from Asuncion and one from the Menno colony. The others speak all Plattdeutsch with all of the family. One of the women of the older generation in Asuncion (A2) said that in their family they had spoken German one hour a day as the children grew up. The reason was that German is spoken in school and they needed to practice the language more. However, it was difficult to keep to this rule and after some years they stopped.

A1	German
A2	Plattdeutsch
A3	Plattdeutsch
A4	German
M1	Plattdeutsch
M2	Plattdeutsch
M3	German
M4	Plattdeutsch

Table 1: Language spoken to the children.

In the interviews, the women had different reasons for using German in their conversation with their children. Interviewee A1 said that they had used German since they have lived in a neighbourhood where the majority have spoken German and some Spanish. The children's friends have therefore been German speakers. The parents had only taught them some words in Plattdeutsch when the children had asked for it. One of the children found it frustrating not to be able to understand their relatives when they travelled to the Chaco. So they started asking and listening to conversations in Plattdeutsch and learned it that way. However, when asked if she wanted her children to learn Plattdeutsch she had preferred that they would not have done it. The reason was that Plattdeutsch is not important. It can only be used with the Mennonites in the Chaco but is not useful in other countries.

Interviewee A4 also gave the children's friends as a reason for using German with the children. However, in comparison with A1 she prefers that her children would learn Plattdeutsch as well. They learn it by speaking to their relatives. She believes that it is always good to know another language. In addition, Plattdeutsch includes many words from other languages (such as English, Dutch, Swedish and Afrikaans), this makes it easier to learn more languages. Knowing Plattdeutsch is important because of this reason. Knowing another language means an additional way of communication.

Also interviewee M3 speaks German to her children. Her main reason for speaking German with her children is that it is important for school. If they do not know German they will get problems at school since everything is taught in German. She says that almost all the parents of her children's friends speak German (this can be compared with information from one of the key witnesses who claims that only a minority speak German to their children in the Menno colony). M3 wants her children to learn Plattdeutsch since the majority of the people in the colony speak it. However, since only Mennonites speak it she does not think that the language is important.

The reasons for using Plattdeutsch with their children are mainly family and social reasons. ‘Everyone speaks Plattdeutsch’ is a common answer. ‘We have always spoken Plattdeutsch, it’s our parents’ mother tongue’. It is important to be able to speak Plattdeutsch since the rest of the family speaks it. One interviewee (M1) says that they have no choice, everything in the colony is in Plattdeutsch. She wanted to speak German but her husband did not agree. Another reason for speaking Plattdeutsch is that the women feel insecure about their knowledge of German and are therefore afraid of teaching them a German full of errors.

None of the women in the Menno colony expressed any plans to move away from the colony. Of the women in Asuncion one said that they had been thinking about moving back to the colony, but only for a limited period of time, not to stay. I have not found a strong connection between plans to move and the use of language.

4.2.2 Estimated value of different languages

When looking at the estimated value of Plattdeutsch five of the interviewees said that knowing Plattdeutsch is of little importance. Two believed it to be important and one said it was very important. See figure 3 below:

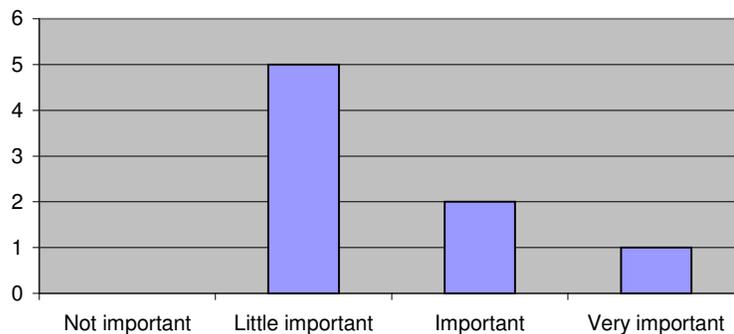


Fig. 3. Importance given to Plattdeutsch among the 8 informants.

A slight difference can be seen between the interviewees in Asuncion and in Chaco. See fig 4.

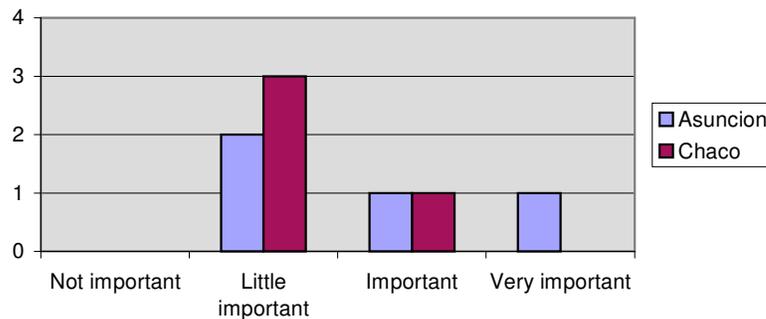


Fig. 4. Importance given to Plattdeutsch in Asuncion vs. Chaco.

The majority of the informants said that Plattdeutsch is important for family relationships, for example to be able to communicate with grandparents, and to get around in the colony since ‘everyone’ speaks Plattdeutsch. It is also good to know another language. But outside family

or the colony it is not important. However, one of the women in Asuncion said that it is very important to know Plattdeutsch in order to know their origin as Mennonites. When asked about the importance of German, Spanish, Plattdeutsch and Guaraní in their present situation the result turned out as shown in figure 5:

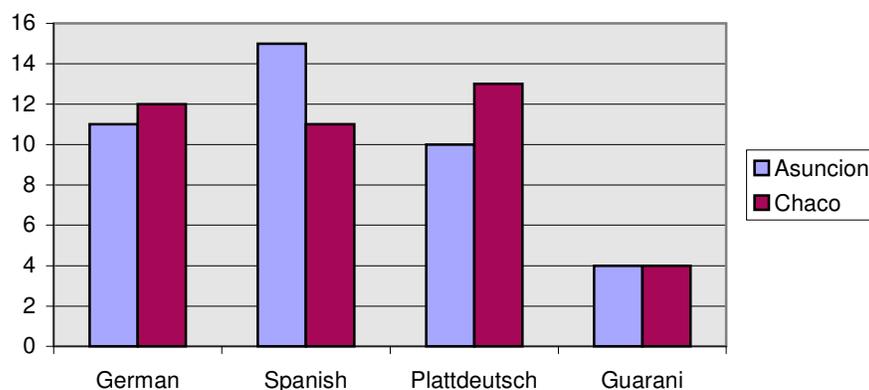


Fig. 5. Importance given to German, Spanish, Plattdeutsch and Guaraní in Asuncion vs Chaco.

The languages have been given scores according to their importance. When placed in first place (most important) the language has been given a score of 4, second place 3, third place 2 and fourth place 1. As is shown in the figure the women in Asuncion rate Spanish as the most important language in their present situation and the women in Chaco rate Plattdeutsch as most important.

4.3 Examination of beliefs and observations from a school-leader perspective concerning the relative status of the languages/varieties concerned

The information concerning beliefs and observations from a school-leader perspective is taken from interviews with key informants who are in a school-leader position.

There are three reasons for teaching German. The biggest one is that German is one of the most important languages in the world. In addition, not many schools in Paraguay teach German. The school in Asuncion has been acknowledged as a trilingual school (German, Spanish and Guaraní) by the Department of Education and Culture. A third important reason is tradition. Among Mennonites, German has always been taught at school together with another language. However, this is disappearing more and more since it is difficult to maintain the same traditions when the school is not in a closed colony as it traditionally has been and German is not the most important language in society. However, many of the students have German documents, which give them the possibility to go to Germany to continue their studies there.

Concerning the motivation for learning German among the Mennonites at the school, it varies throughout the time of study. One of the key witnesses divides the motivation into three phases. In the first phase, when the children start school, the motivation is high. There are two groups of students. Some come from homes where both parents, or one parent speak German at home and it is then perceived as something natural to continue with German at school. For the other group of children it is exciting to learn a new language. In the second phase (grade 7-12) the motivation decreases. The students realise that it takes effort to learn Spanish, and

many feel embarrassment because of their German accent when speaking Spanish. And the focus is more on learning Spanish and trying to erase their accent than on learning German. In this phase the question of WHY they have to learn German arises. The third phase is post upper secondary school (post grade 12) where the majority of the students are proud of being able to speak German. The more languages one knows, the more openings on the job market. Especially in Paraguay there are many companies where knowing German is a merit.

People who have lived in Asuncion for a long time say that the students at the German-speaking school in Asuncion seem to have a more extensive vocabulary now than before and speak German with more certainty. One possible reason is that many of the teachers at the school come from Germany. Before most teachers were Mennonites from Paraguay with a limited knowledge of German. However, many students between 15 and 20 years old feel more comfortable speaking Spanish. This may have to do with the reason mentioned above concerning feelings of inferiority.

4.4 Identification of the factors that influence the language shift among the Mennonites

The change of the demographic situation is one of the most prominent factors that influence the language change. Several Mennonites from the Menno colony have moved to Canada or to Asuncion. Young Mennonites cannot afford to buy land and instead choose a more secure job than agriculture. The result is that the colony is not growing anymore. But the surrounding population is. More and more people of other cultural origins are coming to the colony in search for jobs. The Mennonite colonies are like rich islands in a undeveloped country.

Until recently the surrounding people (of Latin American or indigenous origin) have learned the language of the Mennonites in order to be able to communicate. However, since the surrounding population is growing and the Mennonites are now a minority group in the Chaco, they cannot require the surrounding population to learn their language. The surrounding population come from many different linguistic backgrounds and the language they have in common is Spanish. This means that in order to be able to work together even the older generation Mennonites have had to sit down and study the Spanish language.

In addition the colony has traditionally been a self-supporting community but is now a modern society with national and international business relationships. This requires a certain level of language skills. When it comes to national business relationships the language used is mostly Spanish. This is another domain where the Spanish language is winning ground and replacing German.

A few years ago only white Mennonite youths could be seen on the streets. Today, there are young people of different cultural backgrounds conversing or playing football. The language they use is Spanish. The increasing contact between cultures in the streets also encourages romantic relationships between the youths. This will also increase the number of marriages between Mennonites and people from the surrounding culture with a different linguistic origin. This means an increasing number of couples speaking Spanish with each other and with their children. As a result more and more children in the kindergarten will have parents of mixed origin. The rapid opening towards other cultures results in a need to learn new languages (in this case Spanish) in order to be able to communicate. The schools will have more and more

pupils who have Spanish as their mother tongue. The school will then be mixed linguistically, like the Mennonite schools in Asuncion.

Formal education is an important factor when it comes to language maintenance as claimed by Landry and Allard (1991) and Allan and Landry (1992). Paraguayan law permits the schools to teach the subjects through the medium of the children's mother tongue during the first school years. The educational department in the Menno colony has tried to get the government to consider the Mennonite Chaco as a German-Spanish bilingualism area instead of Spanish-Guaraní, as is the case in the rest of the country. However the government has not given their approval to this yet. A result of this would be that the schools would not have to teach Guaraní but could focus on German and Spanish and as well include more teaching of English.

When asked about the cultural origin of most of their friends, all the women interviewed, both in Asuncion and the Menno colony state that their closest friends are of Mennonite origin. The friendship circle is another factor that influences the use of language. Some of the interviewees from Asuncion say that they have some friends from Latin-American backgrounds as well. The two younger interviewees from Asuncion also say that they live in areas where just a few Mennonites live, or where there is a mixture between Mennonites and Latin-Americans. This results in a greater interaction with Spanish speakers. They are also the only the interviewees that interact daily with Spanish speakers.

4.5 Identification of the influences that the change of languages exerts on the Mennonite values and identity

When children have parents of mixed origin they will not only be bilingual but also be part of two cultures. Through the bicultural children the Mennonite culture starts to change. One of the key interviewees sees a risk in this. Mennonites have always had a very high work ethic. There are unfortunately several cases when couples, where the husband is of non-Mennonite background, have got into trouble economically because of different views on work ethic and economic issues and because of difficulty to find a job for the Latin-American husband, who often is the breadwinner of the family.

When asked if the interviewees would approve of their children marrying a person of another cultural background than Mennonite, only one of the women answered that she would not have any difficulty at all. The majority of the women said that the most important question was whether their child's partner was a Christian or not. However, five of the women expressed clearly that they would have great difficulties accepting it, but emphasised that no matter what they think, it is up to their children to decide. But because of the cultural differences it will not be easy.

The interviewees were asked if they feel more Mennonite or more Paraguayan or if one can make a separation like this at all. All the interviewees except one see themselves as more Mennonite than Paraguayan. Some of the comments were that it is difficult to identify with the Latin Paraguayan values. In addition they look different to the Latin Paraguayans since they are white. One woman says that she is Paraguayan because she lives in Paraguay, but her identity is Mennonite. She is a part of that culture. One of the key witnesses expresses the feeling of dislocation that many immigrants feel: 'I do not know if I am German, Paraguayan or Canadian. I have a Canadian passport, I speak German but I live in Paraguay. However, I

do not feel part of this country.’ Another says that ‘the Paraguayans respect us, but we are seen as another group, we are not from Paraguay. We are like vagabonds in Paraguay.’

When the interviewees were asked to define who is a Mennonite, several answers were given:

Mennonites are hard workers.

They have a purpose in life

They are careful about their culture

They care for the community.

The way they speak, their accent.

They speak Plattdeutsch.

They speak German and Plattdeutsch

Their character differs them from the Germans

The food they eat is different to the Latin-American food.

They are honest, faithful, sincere.

They are united, work in co-operation.

They belong to the ethnic Mennonite group.

They are born Mennonites. Their parents are Mennonites.

The meaning of the word Mennonite is to belong to an evangelical church or congregation of the Mennonite denomination. Mennonite is therefore a confessional concept, however, when looking at the answers that the interviewees have given above the picture of a Mennonite has more to do with the character and ethnic identity than their faith. Several of the interviewees started by saying that a Mennonite is one that belongs to a Mennonite church. However, when asked if a Latin-American belonging to a Mennonite church was a Mennonite, all the interviewees said no. In the end, most of the interviewees concluded that in their view, a Mennonite is a person of Mennonite ethnic origin. The answers given above are some of the values that are very important among the Mennonites. These values were also mentioned when asked about what they are most proud of when talking about their cultural inheritance. In Sawatsky’s study (1996:95) the three most important cultural elements, according to the results of his questionnaire, were the faith, dedication to work and the dialect (Plattdeutsch).

5 Discussion

5.1 Language use

Educational research suggests that the medium of teaching at pre-school and kindergarten levels should ideally be the child’s language (Skutnabb-Kangas 2001). One of the key informants stated that the pre-school in Asuncion used German as a medium of education. For many of the children this is their mother tongue. However, in the colony the mother tongue for the majority of the children is not German but Plattdeutsch. The teachers at pre-school should then use Plattdeutsch when speaking to the children if one should follow the recommendations of Skutnabb-Kangas.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) continues saying that the curriculum in primary school should ideally be taught in the minority language and it should also be taught as a subject on a regular basis. At the Mennonite schools both Asuncion and the Menno colony, German is taught as a subject. However, they differ in the amount of German used at school. While the schools in the Menno colony use German as the language of education, the Mennonite school mentioned in 4.1.1 in Asuncion teaches about half of the subjects in German and half in

Spanish (calculated on a teaching week of 16 hours). However, in Asuncion the majority of the children are bilingual in Spanish and German and can therefore handle that the teaching is not in the language they speak at home but in the majority language.

Some other former German-speaking schools have chosen to use only Spanish as the language of tuition and give German as an additional voluntary subject. This means that German is not 'forced' on the pupils who sometimes don't understand why they should learn a language they cannot use outside church and family. However, this also means that perhaps pupils choose not to learn German and German then eventually disappears completely from the schedule.

Concerning the secondary school, Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) says that a substantial part of the curriculum should be taught through the medium of the minority language and it should also continue to be taught as a subject. Throughout this period the number of subjects taught in the State language, in this case Spanish, should gradually be increased. She writes that 'research findings suggest that the more gradual the increase, the better for the child'. Both the school in Asuncion and the schools in the Menno colony increase the number of subjects taught in Spanish throughout secondary school. And it seems like the school in Asuncion has succeeded in teaching the students German, even the pupils who do not have German as their mother tongue since the pupils are doing very well on the German university entrance examination.

In the colony the children are exposed to submersion education, where all subjects are taught in German and not in Plattdeutsch, and immersion education, where the tuition language is German and Spanish. Some parents have chosen to do what Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) suggest would happen as a result of submersion education, they speak German to their children instead of Plattdeutsch. The schools in the Menno colony use both a submersion and an immersion educational system. Submersion education since the pupils are forced to study all subjects in German, a language that is for the majority not their mother tongue. And immersion education since Spanish is introduced gradually and several subjects are taught in Spanish. It fulfils all the criteria given for an immersion education (see section 2.6), however the status difference of German and Spanish can be discussed. In Paraguay as a country Spanish has a higher status than German. However, in the Menno colony German could be said to have a higher status than Spanish since it is the language of important institutions in the colony. And then the Mennonite schools in the colony would fulfil the criteria for giving immersion education (as well as submersion education).

According to my observations, the interviews and the key informants the majority of the Mennonites in the Menno colony speak Plattdeutsch with their families, while Spanish can be the language of work outside the home. Among the Mennonites in Asuncion German or Plattdeutsch seem to be the language of the family while Spanish is the language of work. This is in accordance to what Fishman (1965:97, 100) says about the resistance to displacement of languages. The family domain is more resistant to language change than the work domain. So far I have not heard any couples where both parents are of Mennonite background (either in Asuncion or in the Chaco) speak Spanish to their children.

It seems like the question of security is more important than the proficiency level. The feeling of security when speaking the language differs between the women in Asuncion and the women in the Menno colony. See Table 2 below. The levels of security have been graded: not so secure (0), secure (1) and very secure (2)

	German			Spanish	
Speaker	Level	Security		Level	Security
A1	2	2		1	0
A2	1	2		1	2
A3	2	1		1	1
A4	2	2		2	2
M1	1	2		2	0
M2	1	2		1	0
M3	1	1		1	0
M4	1	1		1	0

Table 2. Estimated proficiency level and the level of security when speaking the language.

The informants in Asuncion estimate their proficiency level in speaking German as higher than the informants in the Menno colony. There is a slight difference in the feeling of security as well between the informants. Three of the women in Asuncion feel very secure when speaking German, while two feel very secure in the Menno colony.

Regarding Spanish, none of the women in the Menno colony feel sure when using the language. This can be compared with the women in Asuncion where only one woman feels insecure. Even though the estimated proficiency level in the language is similar between the informants in the Menno colony and Asuncion the security level is higher among the women in Asuncion. If this is a sign of modesty when estimating their proficiency level is difficult to say. However, it may suggest that they have seen that even though their knowledge of Spanish is not perfect, at least they feel that they can get by.

When speaking to students at a secondary school in the Menno colony they expressed a feeling of insecurity when speaking Spanish. One pupil said that at her school they study a lot of grammar and copy sentences, but they hardly ever practice communication. In order for the students in the outskirts of the colony to learn to communicate well in Spanish there is a need for more communication exercises. Especially for the students who go to smaller schools in the countryside where almost everybody is of Plattdeutsch speaking origin.

5.2 Degree of importance given to Plattdeutsch and other languages and a school leader perspective

Concerning the use of German or Plattdeutsch when speaking to their children I do believe I would have got a different result if I had interviewed only mothers of the younger generation in Asuncion. According to my own observations I have heard a lot of parents speaking German to their children when they plan to stay in Asuncion for a longer period of time. However, these parents are not only from the Menno colony and as showed earlier in this study. Mennonites from the neighbouring colonies have a greater tendency to use German. In addition, in Asuncion people marry across the colonies so that one parent is from one colony and the other from another. That means that the parent from the Menno colony might speak German if the other parent is from one of the more German speaking colonies. This contributes to the decreasing number of people speaking Plattdeutsch.

Kostoulas-Maktrakis writes, 'it is natural to expect that when an immigrant group feels its presence in a community, people are more committed to enhancing the ethnolinguistic survival of their group' (1995:119). One of the women of the younger generation in Asuncion recognises this need. She says that knowing Plattdeutsch is very important. It is important for the culture and their identity. She and her husband have made a conscious choice to speak Plattdeutsch to their children. They have seen that the dialect is about to disappear and therefore want to take action. She thinks that if they were to speak German to their children there would be no difference between their *Mennonite* children and *German* children (with their origin in Germany, authors comment). They would not be aware of their origin.

I believe that in order for the dialect to stay among the Mennonites in Paraguay, a conscious decision will have to be made, like the one made by the parents above. I do not think it is enough to only decide to speak one language, but to be aware of the reason *why* that language has been chosen. Concerning the use of Plattdeutsch and awareness of their origin, I wonder if the loss of Plattdeutsch would lead to a loss of this awareness. The neighbouring colonies have in some areas already lost Plattdeutsch or use it to a limited extent. However, does this mean that they have lost their awareness of their origin? I believe that this awareness can be stressed in other ways than through the language alone.

I do agree with the mother above when she says that the use of Plattdeutsch constitutes a clear difference between *Mennonite* children and *German* children. The question is *why* it is important to clearly demonstrate a difference between children of Mennonite and German origin. Speaking a language other to the majority languages (both Spanish and German are world languages) gives a feeling of belonging to a special group. They share something different to other people. Without the language the feeling of being special is harder to achieve.

When rating the most important languages in their present situation, the interviewees in Asuncion clearly chose Spanish as the most important language before German and Plattdeutsch. They have daily contact with Spanish speakers and must therefore use Spanish. In the Menno colony there was no language that seemed to be much more important than the other, even though Plattdeutsch got the highest score. Sawatsky (1996:93) find a tendency in his study that adults in the Menno colony see German and Spanish as equally important while young people give priority to Spanish. The women in the Menno colony sometimes gave high scores to Spanish even though they do not use it in their every day life. However, they emphasised that since they live in Paraguay it is an important language.

It is interesting to see that in Asuncion two out of four interviewees thought Plattdeutsch to be of little importance while three out of four interviewees in the Chaco shared this opinion. In Asuncion one of the women thought it to be very important. This is the same woman that expressed the conscious need to keep Plattdeutsch alive. Even though the four women in Chaco live in a Plattdeutsch speaking environment they still believe that the value of the language is low. The speakers seem to see a limited area of use and therefore it is not important to know the language. This can be compared with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivation sources. There is an integrative motivation because the language is needed in family relationships and to be an accepted member of the community. However, the instrumental motivation, where the person preserves the language for its utilitarian value, is low. Knowing Plattdeutsch does not give status in society and is not useful outside the community. The utilitarian use is therefore limited.

The three motivation levels that can be seen among the pupils in Asuncion can also be compared with Garner and Lambert's (1972) motivation sources. When the pupils start school and the motivation is high, the pupils with German as mother tongue are integratively motivated. They have grown up with German and want to continue to be a member of the German-speaking group. The children who do not have German as mother tongue might have the same motivation: to be part of the target language group and to be an accepted member.

In the second motivation level the pupils change their integrative motivation to Spanish instead of German. They want to be part of the Spanish-speaking culture and not be different to the majority. This motivation is so strong that they do not see any utilitarian value for German.

However, in the third motivation level the pupils see the utilitarian value and how the language can help them to gain personal success. As some of the students had noticed, there were more job openings when they knew German well.

The pupils in the Menno colony are not confronted in the same way with Spanish as the pupils in Asuncion. Using German at school is seen as a more natural part of school than in Asuncion, even though some people question the teaching in German when living in a Spanish speaking country. However, the limited Spanish interaction might mean that the pupils in the Menno colony do not go through the same three motivation stages as the pupils in Asuncion.

In the Menno colony, some parents have chosen to speak German with their children others speak Plattdeutsch. Some feel that their proficiency level of German is not high enough in order to be able to speak German with their children. However, parents in the Menno colony do not have the same choice as the parents in Asuncion when it comes to putting their children in a German-speaking school or not. The schools in the colony use German as the language of tuition and for many people this is something that is taken for granted since it has always been like that. The parents do not have to make an active choice concerning the language of education of their children. The parents in Asuncion, on the other hand, have actively chosen to put their children in a German-speaking school and not in a Spanish-speaking school. They are probably eager that their children learn German and keep it vivid and are therefore also keen to help their children in this task. Since it is an active choice made by the parents, the pupils in the German-speaking school in Asuncion might receive more support from home when it comes to studying German than the pupils in the Menno colony.

Many of the pupils in the German-speaking school feel embarrassment because of their German accent when speaking Spanish. They then focus more on learning Spanish and trying to erase their accent than on learning German. A status difference can be seen between German and Spanish where Spanish is given higher status and priority. This can be compared with Swedish students studying in Content and language integrated learning in Sweden (see Hyltenstam 2004). The pupils had divided feelings about the effect that studying in English at school had on their mother tongue, Swedish. Some of the students commented that they would rather accept a negative effect from speaking English than from speaking Swedish. There is a status difference where English has higher status than Swedish and it is important to speak English very well.

5.3 Factors that influence language shift

The question of mixed marriages is important. It is assimilation into the Paraguayan society. There are several marriages where one partner is of Mennonite origin and the other of Latin American origin. I have heard several mixed couples speak mostly Spanish to their children, many times because one parent does not know Plattdeutsch or German and it has therefore been easier to use Spanish as the family language. In these couples Spanish is the first language of the children and Plattdeutsch the second and German becomes the third language when starting school. The children have the eight benefits that Li Wei (200:22-24) points out, for example being able to communicate in each parent's preferred language, having extended family relationships, being able to communicate with a wider variety of people than a monolingual etc. They also have access to two different sets of values. However, at times they will have to choose from these sets when it is not possible to combine the two. Their choice will then affect the continuation of either of the two sets of values.

There are also mixed marriages between Mennonites of different origins (different countries or colonies) and where one partner is of Mennonite ethnic origin and the other from a European origin (not Mennonite). However, these mixed marriages do not cause the same effect on the Mennonite European culture since the cultures are more similar than in the mixed Mennonite-Latin American marriages.

In general, there is a greater mixture between German-speaking Mennonites and Spanish-speaking Latin-Americans in Asuncion than in the Chaco and according to the key informants, both Plattdeutsch and German will disappear first in Asuncion and then in the colonies. As long as the colony exists in its present form, the use of Plattdeutsch and German will also remain as it is today. However, since the colony is going through a rapid change the language situation also changes.

The children who come from mixed Mennonite-Latin American marriages are then integrated in the Mennonite society and speak Spanish with more facility. This encourages the use of Spanish more and more in the community from kindergarten to school. Sawatsky (1996:74) writes that school played an important role in the changes of the different institutions in the colony (such as church, the economy, the production etc.) and I believe that it plays an important role when it comes to the use of different languages as well. Teaching Spanish at school enables the students to communicate with people of Spanish-speaking origin and then mix more easily with other cultures.

The role of the school and the teacher also changes in a multicultural and multilingual school. In the future, there might be a need to organise the school in the way that it has been done in Asuncion when it comes to the teaching in German, with one group of pupils that have German as their mother tongue and another with pupils who have other mother tongues. Children may come from families where they have no contact with German before starting school. Learning new subjects taught in a language the child does not understand make his or her education much more complicated, perhaps even impossible. See Wedin (in press) for a comparable situation in Tanzania.

There are several children who come from a Plattdeutsch speaking background only and start school without knowing German at all. However, most Plattdeutsch speaking children pick it up fairly easy after some time and learn to both speak and write German. However, when the

child is of Spanish-speaking background it is much more difficult since Spanish and German are from two different language groups.

5.4 Values and identity

There seem to be a conflict between the 'real' definition of a Mennonite (a confessional definition) and the perceived definition (an ethnic definition). Although all the women interviewed said that a Mennonite is a person belonging to the Mennonite church they did not accept Latin-Americans as Mennonites. For some of the women I could pass as a Mennonite because I am white. However, another woman said that I could not since my parents were not of Mennonite origin. One of the women discovered that she believed that the colour of skin was important for the Mennonite identity. For some women the language was also important. A Mennonite should be able to speak Plattdeutsch and/or German. This is reflected in a comment made by a child to her mother during one of the interviews: 'Why do you speak Spanish with her when she is white?' In the eyes of the child I was probably a Mennonite since I was white and all Mennonites speak German or Plattdeutsch. However, something was wrong since I spoke Spanish with her parents.

The languages, Plattdeutsch and/or German are visible signs that set the Mennonites apart from the surrounding cultures. It gives a sense of group belonging. One of the key witnesses says that Mennonites eventually will lose their identity because of the language. Not because of the language itself, but the better they speak Spanish the easier it is to mix with the Latin culture. And this will eventually lead to a loss of Mennonite culture and identity. Several of the women interviewed also express this 'fear' when mixing with other cultures. Values such as being honest, hard working and work in co-operation seem to be important. And when asked what they would lose when leaving German and Plattdeutsch behind and mixing with the Latin culture, these were the values that were mentioned. A fear of losing their faith was not expressed.

In Canada, some Mennonites feared that the loss of German would mean a gradual loss of their Mennonite faith and culture through assimilation into the Canadian environment (Dyck 1993:322). The result was that they moved to Paraguay in order to isolate the community and keep the language. Some of the women interviewed as well as the informants in Sawatsky's (1996) study expressed a similar concern. When asked what the Mennonites would lose in case of an integration into the Paraguayan society, the language (German) was put in first place (Sawatsky 1996:138). However, being so radical as to move to another country or to isolate the community was not believed to be an option.

The more Spanish people know, the easier it is to mix with the surrounding cultures and then take on the values that are connected with those cultures. It is more a question of mixing with a different culture than losing the language. When living in a closed colony the language and values are more easily maintained. However, when opening up the community, the language is lost and part of its values. The change of language encourages integration because only through communication do we learn the values, traditions and customs of the other culture.

Sawatsky (1996:78) discusses the difference between assimilation and integration. In the case of assimilation the society would lose its cultural identity and values. While in the case of a healthy integration into the Paraguayan society the Mennonite values would be kept and new values from other cultures, such as the indigenous and the Paraguayan culture, would be

inserted. Integration admits a certain amount of pluriculturalism. Sawatsky claims that in the case of an integration neither the faith, nor the dedication to work have to be lost. This does not mean however, that changes will not take place.

5.5 Method evaluation

I made the interviews in the homes of the women interviewed. Both because of practical reasons and because I wanted the interviewees to feel comfortable. However, this also brought unexpected problems. For example at one interview the interviewee's husband joined us after a while. He tried several times to answer the questions I asked to his wife, in spite of my attempts to emphasise that the interview was with his wife and not with both of them. I believe that the husband's presence influenced the results in the interview in the way that the answers were shorter and not so detailed.

Being in the house of the interviewee also resulted in several disturbances in the interview such as the phone ringing, people coming to visit or children coming home from school. However, I do think that having the interviews in another place would have made the women more uncomfortable and the interview would have been more formal. My aim was to get an informal conversation as possible within the limits of an interview.

I would have liked to have done two pilot interviews instead of one before having the real interviews. I only had a pilot interview with a woman from the younger generation. I would have liked to have had an interview with a woman from the older generation as well, since the questions had to be adapted to the past (when asking about what language they *had spoken with their children when raising them*). This would have helped me in the formation of the questions for these interviews.

6 Conclusion

The high level of language knowledge among the Mennonites is promising for the future. In the Menno colony Plattdeutsch is still used frequently and is important in central parts of life such as important social networks. As most people also have a fairly high command of German, the level of bilingualism is high. This gives the majority in the Menno colony access to at least two languages for effective communication. However, the beginning tendency among parents to raise their children in German is a sign of an emergent language shift to monolingualism or bilingualism in German Spanish.

6.1 Language shift and Mennonite identity

Is a language shift on its way? Yes, I believe so and I also believe that it started many years ago. However, the question is if losing Plattdeutsch or German means a total loss of the Mennonite identity. What is lost together with the language? Edwards (1985) states that language is not necessary for the continuation of an individual's identity. In part I want to agree with him when it comes to the Mennonites in Paraguay.

Edwards' first point is that ethnic identity is related to ancestral links. The Mennonites have a rich history that binds them together. It is a history full of values that are important to many

Mennonites. However, there is a risk that this history is forgotten by the younger generation. The values that have been important historically are not so important for the youths. They grow up in a 'westernised' society. They have not been forced to work hard for their living, like their ancestors have had to do. Some take their life-style for granted and then forget their history. What their ancestors have done does not make an impact on their lives. They have forgotten that 'to be a Mennonite then means to identify with a particular Christian community with a particular story, remembering what has been seen in the beginning and over time, and shaping what might yet be to the glory of God' ('Mennonite' in ME 5:555-557 Rodney J. Sawatsky in Dyck 1993)

Edwards' (1985) second point is that socialisation or cultural patterns may continue over generations without being necessarily associated with language. In the case of the Mennonites, it is not language that has been the prominent factor. Because they have lived in a isolated community, socialisation and cultural patterns have been able to continue. The language has also continued to be used as a result of the colonies being isolated. However, when a minority community, which used to be isolated, opens up, more contacts with the world outside are established. This results in a necessity of being able to communicate with each other. Since the common language in Paraguay is Spanish, both parts have to learn Spanish and I believe that this will eventually lead to a shift to Spanish. It is, however, not the fact that the language is changed that interrupts the traditional socialisation and cultural patterns but the opening up to and interaction with the surrounding cultures.

It is interesting to look at the estimated value of Plattdeutsch given by the women interviewed. The fact that they did not believe Plattdeutsch to be very important shows that it will disappear (see Holmes 1992 who believe that a language that is considered as an important symbol of ethnic identity has more chances for maintenance.). If the Mennonites want to keep Plattdeutsch and German as a part of their everyday interaction, parents and the society have to make a conscious decision and effort to use the languages and value them. The question is if this is possible with the pressure from the surrounding cultures. I believe that the loss of German will affect the society more than the loss of Plattdeutsch since German is tightly connected to the religion, because of bible reading and praying. As one of the key informants said: 'When I was a kid, I thought God only spoke German'.

Edwards' (1985) third point is that some sense of group boundary must persist, even though the cultural content within these boundaries may have changed radically. Among the Mennonites it is not the language that is the prominent factor that binds them together. It is the religion. The language sets them apart from the surrounding cultures and gives a sense of group belonging. However, their identity is more tied to their faith than to their language. Living in closed colonies, speaking a language/languages that set them apart from the surrounding cultures and having a strong religion have made it possible to maintain the Mennonite identity.

It is true what Fishman (1989:674) says that losing the language exacts a huge price in terms of ethnocultural authenticity and continuity. It is much more difficult to keep the culture together without a common language, a language that is a trade mark for that culture. However, Panharipade (1992:261) argues that 'the loss of one identity marker does not automatically entail the loss of cultural identity.

Sawatsky (1996:94) writes that some parts of the Mennonite identity will be lost. But it does not lead to a total loss of the culture. He claims that a 'change of language, that is, from

German to Spanish, does not mean a loss of identity, but can lead to a cultural enrichment. The postmodern society demands the command of more than one language.' The Menno colony is opening up, losing its isolation and they are losing their language. Are they also losing their faith?

I believe that in order to maintain the Mennonite identity in a time of rapid change there is a need to re-value the values. It is a fact that the colony is opening up and mixing with the surrounding culture. I do not believe that stopping this and isolating the colony again would be an alternative. It is also a fact that the use of Spanish is increasing in the colony and is taking over the role of Plattdeutsch and German in more and more areas. I do not believe that this development can be stopped either. Eventually Spanish will replace both Plattdeutsch and German as the mother tongue of the Mennonites. At the same time I believe that Plattdeutsch will disappear faster than German since German does exist in written form and it is used in formal institutions such as church and school. In the Menno colony the tradition of speaking Plattdeutsch has always been strong. This can be compared to the two neighbouring colonies where the use of German is more common. They have come either directly from Germany or via Germany, and German is therefore closer in history than for the Menno colony. The fact that the Menno colony has contacts with German speakers in Asuncion, in the neighbouring colonies and in Germany also contributes to the maintenance of the language for a longer period of time than for Plattdeutsch.

However, like Sawatsky (1996) I believe that the Mennonites can keep their Mennonite identity since it is more tied to the religion than to the language, although it will be more difficult without a common language. In order to do that, there is a need to re-value and re-define the Mennonite identity. There is a need to sit down and define what it is that makes a person a Mennonite. Is it the language? Is it being hard working? Is it being white? Is it being born to Mennonite parents? Or is it the faith? I believe that the identity is in the faith and that the values such as being hard working, honest, faithful, sincere and co-operative are results of that faith. These are biblical values, not values particular for the Mennonite community. There is a need to come back to the heart of the Mennonite faith, that is the Christian faith, and there find their true identity. If a conscious effort is made to do this, I believe that the Mennonites in Paraguay will continue to be Mennonites no matter where they live and no matter what language they speak.

6.2 The role of the school

In one area the Mennonites in the Menno colony have made a conscious decision concerning the maintenance of the language, and that is in the school. The Mennonite schools should continue the good language policy they already have. So far there are no plans to substitute the teaching in German with teaching in Spanish. And in Asuncion both pupils with German as their mother tongue and as their foreign language seem to reach a very high result on tests. It has also been confirmed by people outside the school that the pupils' German proficiency has improved over the years.

However, the fact that many children do not know any German when entering school, especially in the Menno colony, causes problems, and it makes it more difficult for the pupils to learn other subjects, since they are taught only in German and the children then do not understand what the teacher is saying. Some children have difficulties learning to read and write since they are taught in a foreign language. However, as has been said earlier in the

present essay, Plattdeutsch and German are from the same language family and this facilitates their learning of German. But two questions arise at submersion education: What happens with those children who have difficulties reading and writing when they have to learn this in a language that is not their mother tongue? And, is the level of the pupils' subject knowledge as high as if they were to study the subjects in Plattdeutsch?

Wedin (2004) writes about the submersion education in Tanzania that:

the most important barrier for development of schooled knowledge and literacy is the discontinuity in language use. The fact that most pupils do not understand the language used in school during the important lower classes in primary school leads to low achievement and unequal educational chances.

This is a risk that is present also in the Mennonite schools in the Menno colony. When the medium of tuition is not their mother tongue the pupils do not only have to learn the subjects but at the same time a new language. Wedin (2004) wants to encourage teachers to use both the language of tuition, in this case German, and the pupils' mother tongue Plattdeutsch, to help pupils understand. She also writes that the teaching of the language of tuition should be based on research on how children develop a second language, to make it more efficient. She continues, 'recognising the value of local languages could have positive effects throughout education, not only on literacy but also on /.../ other subjects', including German (authors comment).

Hyltenstam (2004:85) writes that the interaction in the classrooms where the tuition was given in another language than the mother tongue of the pupils was lower than in the classroom where mother tongue of the pupils was used. As one of the students in Brock-Utne (2002:22) study in Tanzania expressed:

I do not like to speak English, because I cannot speak fluent English. When I am speaking English, which is not my everyday language, I speak slowly and therefore, first, I feel uncomfortable, I do not enjoy speaking, and secondly I may not succeed in communicating what I want to say

I believe that there is a risk that the intellectual level of discussions had about different subjects at school will not be as high as if the pupils were discussing in their mother tongue, whether it be Plattdeutsch or German.

I believe that the Mennonite schools should continue the language policy they have and continue teaching German. As some of the interviewees expressed, knowing different languages is nothing negative. I also believe that if they want to stop the loss of German in the future they should not give German up at school. As Skutnabb-Kangas (2001) states, language is threatened if children are no longer learning it and by that not transferred to the next generation. The school plays then an essential role in this process. It is of vital importance that the school continues teaching German in order to maintain the language active. However, in order to keep the language vivid, German should be used as the language of tuition in a substantial amount of subjects and perhaps maintain a level of at least 50% German tuition. And concerning the teaching of Spanish as a subject, the subject has to involve a lot of communication in order for the pupils to develop good language skills in Spanish.

Some pupils do not see the point of studying German at school, especially not in Asuncion where the pupils live in a Spanish-speaking environment. Awareness among the teachers of the motivation stages of the pupils could help to motivate the pupils to study German. Garner and Lambert's (1972) motivation sources can be used to show the pupils' reasons for studying German. Some students have come back to the school saying that they were happy that they had studied German even though during their schooling, they did not understand the reason why they had to study the language. Perhaps pointing out the positive results of studying German can motivate the pupils more.

According to one of the key witnesses working in the area of education, it is preferred if a child has at least a basic knowledge of German before entering school. However, as seen in my study, some women are afraid of teaching their children a German full of errors and that this would be an obstacle for the child when starting school. I believe that parents can help their children by reading books in German to them. When reading, the parents do not have to worry about their own German grammar. Reading also helps the children develop their language skills. However, German books are very expensive in Paraguay and this makes it more difficult for parents to buy German books. I believe that in order to encourage parents to read more to their children, there is a need for the existing library in the Menno colony to be enlarged and to offer an extensive amount of interesting children books for very small to teenage children as well as interesting adult books. I believe that this is an action that needs to be taken at the earliest possible date in order to both improve the population's knowledge of German and to keep the language as part of the community.

As stated by several researchers (Kostoulas-Makrakis 1995, van der Stoel 1997, Landry and Allard 1991, Allard and Landry 1992 and Fishman 1989) schooling is a very important element in sociocultural socialisation and self-identification. It is also engaged in the preservation and the deepening of the identity of persons' belonging to a national minority. And as Ekstrand (1982) points out, the school system should prepare the young pupils for the society and culture of that particular culture. That means that the Mennonite schools should prepare their pupils for the culture they live in. As schools of two cultures (the Mennonite culture and the Paraguayan culture) they face a difficult task when preparing the pupils for two very different cultures. However, as the pupils in the Menno colony live in the Mennonite society and culture, the school system there should primarily prepare them for that culture. That means that the school has an important role in preserving the pupils minority identity. I believe that in order to do so, also the school leaders have to sit down and define what it is that makes a person a Mennonite. And then re-value and re-define the Mennonite identity and values in order to be able to support and preserve the minority identity of the children.

6.3 Further Research

The present study is very limited and can only show a possible tendency to language shift. There is a need to do a more thorough study that observes the language situation over time and involves a greater number of interviewees.

One of the interviewees in the Menno colony stated that all her friends and the parents of her children's friends spoke German to their children. It would be interesting to make a survey among the parents of the students in the schools in the Menno colony to see what language they are using at home. And then compare the results of the parents in the town and in the villages. This would more clearly show the future of the languages in the colony.

Another interesting subject for further research would be to look at the effect of the submersion education in primary school in the Menno colony. Does this affect the pupils' knowledge about the subjects?

The choice of language when speaking to another bilingual may depend on several factors, for example the topic discussed, the identity the speaker want to assume and the situation in which the conversation takes place. When one of these circumstances changes the language might also change. One method that some bilinguals use when speaking together is code switching. They switch between the languages both between and within sentences (For further discussion on code-switching see Myers Scotton 1988). An interesting subject for further research would be to look at code-switching among Mennonites in Asunción in order to see *if* and in that case *how* Spanish is taking over the traditional role of German and Plattdeutsch. In the Altai dialect, Nieuweboer (1988:193) found that a Russian loan may be used alongside a Plautdiitsch term of Germanic descent and that the Russian word usually denotes something associated with the outside world whereas its Germanic counterpart is used for an in-group activity. It would be interesting to see if a similar distinction could be made in the language use of Mennonites in Paraguay.

Another interesting subject would be a study among young Mennonites in Paraguay. One of the key witnesses said that many young Mennonites in Asuncion go through a stage where they feel a need to identify with the majority population, the Spanish speakers. They then give priority to learning Spanish instead of German. What are then *their* thoughts and feelings about being Mennonites and using a minority language?

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Appendix

Preguntas de entrevista

1. **Edad** 30 55
2. **¿Cuántos hijos tiene Usted?** 1-3 4 o más
3. **¿Cómo se llaman?**
¿Origen de los nombres?
4. **¿Dónde nació Usted?**
5. **¿Cuántos años ha vivido en Asunción/el Chaco?**
6. **¿Cuál es su ocupación?**
(¿Cuál ha sido su ocupación durante los años?)
7. **¿Cuál es su nivel de educación?**
No ha terminado la primaria (menos que 6 años)
Primaria (6 años)
Ciclo básico (9 años)
Bachiller (12 años)
Otro
Universidadaños
8. **¿ Con qué frecuencia visita el Chaco/Asunción?**
(¿ Con qué frecuencia ha visitado el Chaco/Asunción durante los años?)
Nunca Cada año Cada medio año Algunas veces por año
9. **¿Cuál es (ha sido) generalmente el propósito del viaje?**
10. **¿Tiene Usted planes de mudarse al Chaco/Asunción en el futuro? ¿Cuándo?**
(¿Han tenido planes de mudarse al Chaco/Aunción alguna vez?)
11. **¿Qué otras actividades realiza (ha realizado durante los años) que son organizados por los Menonitas aparte del culto dominical?**
¿Qué idioma se habla (ha hablado) generalmente en estos encuentros?
12. **La mayoría de las personas que viven cerca de su casa son:**
No Menonitas
Unos pocos Menonitas
Mezclado
En su mayoría Menonitas
Casi todos son Menonitas
13. **¿De qué cultura provienen la mayoría de sus amigos?**

14. **¿Cuál idioma piensa que es ‘su propio’ idioma? ¿Por qué?**
 Plattdeutsch Alemán Español
15. **¿En qué orden aprendió Ud. los idiomas?**
16. **¿Cómo define Usted Plattdeutsch?** Idioma Dialecto
17. **¿Qué idioma hablaron en casa cuando Usted creció? ¿Qué idioma/s habla Usted con sus hijos? ¿Con su marido? ¿Por qué esta diferencia?**
18. **¿Quiere (quería) Usted que su hijo/hijos aprendan (aprendieron) Plattdeutsch? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué no?**
 Definitivamente no Preferiblemente no Preferiblemente si Definitivamente si
19. **¿Según su punto de vista, cómo definiría a un Menonita?**
20. **¿Se siente más menonita o más paraguaya o no se puede hacer esta división?**
21. **Algunas personas dicen que es conflictivo ser menonita en una sociedad como la de Paraguay. ¿Está de acuerdo con esto? ¿En qué sentido?**
22. **¿Está Usted orgullosa de su herencia cultural? ¿Por qué? ¿En qué sentido?**
23. **¿Según su experiencia, los menonitas son bien vistos en Paraugay?**
 ¿Siempre....? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué no?
24. **¿Qué pensaría sobre su hijo/s casándose con otra cultura (no-menonita)?**
 ¿Depende de la cultura?
25. **Si tuviera la posibilidad de elegir entre plattdeutsch, alemán y español, ¿cuál de los idiomas preferiría hablar?**
 Plattdeutsch alemán español No tiene preferencia
26. **¿Según su opinión, cuán importante es saber Plattdeutsch?**
 No importante
 Poco importante
 Importante
 Muy importante

27. Alemán/plattdeutsch/español – ¿qué idioma habla usted en las siguientes situaciones?

	¿idioma?	¿con todos?	¿siempre?	¿factor de cambio?
Miembros de la familia				
Encontrarse con un Menonita en la calle				
En el trabajo – pedir a alguien para hacer algo				
La iglesia – el servicio				
La iglesia – hablando con gente				
La iglesia – discutiendo algo en grupos pequeños				
La iglesia – hablando con el pastor				
El pastor en la calle En la casa del pastor				

28. ¿Cómo estima su capacidad de manejar los siguientes idiomas...

Muy mal mal bien muy bien

	Alemán	Guaraní	Español	Plattdeutsch	Inglés
Hablando					
Entendiendo discursos					
Escribiendo					
Interpretando textos escritos					

29. ¿Cuando habla Plattdeutsch se siente...?

nerviosa no tan segura segura muy segura

¿Hay ocasiones cuando se siente que su nivel de Plattdeutsch no es suficiente? Describa estas situaciones.

30. ¿Cuando habla alemán se siente...?

nerviosa no tan segura segura muy segura

¿Hay ocasiones cuando se siente que su nivel de alemán no es suficiente? Describa estas situaciones.

31. ¿Cuando habla español se siente...?

nerviosa no tan segura segura muy segura

¿Hay ocasiones cuando se siente que su nivel de español no es suficiente? Describa estas situaciones.

32. ¿En su situación actual (el trabajo, vida etc) cuán importante es hablar bien los siguientes idiomas?

(Póngalos en orden de importancia):

Alemán Español Plattdeutsch Guarani