

American Double Dutch and Verticalization

Charlotte Vanhecke & Joseph Salmons
University of Wisconsin – Madison

We test the verticalization model of language shift (Brown forthcoming) in a new way, comparing shift from Dutch to English in two sets of communities: settlements founded in the early 1600s in New York and New Jersey versus Midwestern communities founded since the mid 19th century. Verticalization correlates shift to fundamental community structure: if a community maintains control over its institutions, it can maintain its community language. If control shifts to non-local actors — e.g. regional, national, corporate — that eventually erodes the language.

These migrations differ sharply in many ways but show close parallels in timing of shift: the East experienced some early verticalization in urban areas, but in rural areas, verticalization was extremely gradual, beginning with the colony's 1664 annexation by England. Clergy and others wrote in Dutch up to the end of the 18th century, using both standard Holland Dutch and American Dutch. Dutch church services endured into the 19th century. Monolingual Dutch speakers existed well into the 1800s (Noordegraaf 2013:93, Bosch 1837). Into the 20th century, bilinguals lived in core eastern communities like Park Ridge, NJ, though the 1910 US Census reports no Dutch monolinguals there. In the Midwest, evidence shows that the Dutch timeline closely parallels what is found in other immigrant communities in the region, where verticalization began not long after many settlements were established (examples in Brown forthcoming). Institutional support — churches, schools, press — and monolingualism survived decades rather than centuries.

Salmons (forthcoming) observes that the last speakers of many Midwestern heritage languages were born around the same time, in the 1940s. Here, we see a surprisingly short gap between last Dutch speakers in the East and Midwest, early 20th century vs. mid-20th. Strikingly, Gehring (1973:116) reports a heritage learner in the 1970s who spoke only New York Dutch with his young children, so that there are likely speakers of both varieties alive today.

Despite their dramatically different linguistic histories, these communities had similar linguistic outcomes. Verticalization and the loss of Dutch moved slowly in the East, while verticalization and language shift were both rapid in the Midwest, yielding similar chronological endpoints. Across all these communities, language shift tracks closely with verticalization, supporting the model.

References

Bosch, Gerardus B. 1827. Eene zomerreis in Noordamerika. II. Albany. *Vaderlandsche Letteroefeningen. II. Mengelwerk* 1827. 272–281.

- Brown, Joshua R., ed. Forthcoming. *Verticalization: A model for language shift*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gehring, Charles T. 1973. *The Dutch Language in Colonial New York: An investigation of a language in decline and its relationship to social change*. Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University.
- Noordegraaf, Jan. 2013. A Language Lost: The Case of Leeg Duits ("Low Dutch"). *Academic Journal of Modern Philology* 2. 91-108.
- Salmons, Joseph. Forthcoming. Verticalization and the last stage of language shift. Kelly Biers & Joshua R. Brown, (eds), *Selected Proceedings of the 11th Workshop on Immigrant Languages in the Americas*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.