

**ON THE TRAIL OF THE CONESTOGA MODAL
Recent Movements of Modal Auxiliaries in Pennsylvania German¹**

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This paper examines some of the recent developments within the class of modal verbs in the variety of Pennsylvania German spoken in Ontario, Canada. It focuses on a number of functional splits which are occurring within the modals; in particular, the curious split of one verb into a modal auxiliary and a new fully-fledged lexical form. This is different from the more familiar process of divergence which applies to cases where a lexical item grammaticalizes and splits into a grammatical form, a modal auxiliary for example, with the original form surviving alongside as an autonomous lexical item.

This development in Pennsylvania German is interesting precisely because it appears to operate against the usual unidirectional path of change which has been identified for grammaticalization. It would appear to be a bona fide example of degrammaticalization, where a lexical form has actually re-evolved out of an already grammaticalized modal verb. Something which also goes against the usual path of development is the fact that it is not the modal auxiliary but the new lexical verb which has undergone phonological reduction. To explain this peculiar change, it is necessary to go beyond the usual linguistic factors and consider the Pennsylvania German's speakers own world view. This paper suggests that pragmatic factors arising from Mennonite religious principles have diverted the more usual path of development and produced a genuine counter-example to unidirectionality in language change.

1. Backdrop — who are the Pennsylvania German speakers?

The Pennsylvania German-speaking group examined here are the Mennonite Anabaptists of Swiss-German origin, who left Pennsylvania for Canada after the American War of Independence. The majority settled in Waterloo County, where they remain today. Since the 1870s, the Mennonites have been experiencing continued factionalism and the result is now a complex pattern of different sub and splinter groups. It is the language of the *Plain Folk* or the Old Order Mennonites which is the focus of this present study. They form the most conservative group. Their dress is distinctive, having changed little over the centuries. They drive horse and buggies, and are typically opposed to modern conveniences like cars, radios etc. Although clearly a purely religious denomination in origin, the Old Order Mennonites are also a distinct cultural-ethnic group with their own unique traditions, beliefs, customs, social practices and of course language.

The best way to view the situation is in terms of a continuum of conservatism — from the most conservative Old Order Mennonites through to the so-called “Progressive” Mennonites, who are indistinguishable from mainstream Canadians. Along this continuum, it is possible to plot different speakers. Competence in Pennsylvania German accords generally with the degree of religious conservatism. It is not that religion directly bears on the linguistic abilities of these people, but it is on account of what their religion entails. For the diglossic Old Order Mennonites, language and religion are closely entwined. Pennsylvania German plays a crucial part in maintaining their separate and “peculiar” status — for this particular group, it is in no danger of dying. Among the *Non-Plain Folk*, however, language proficiency ranges from the

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competent speaker to the semi speaker. However, since even the most competent speakers lack the support of diglossia (i.e. English and Pennsylvania German do not have distinct domains of use), ultimately the shift to English is a certainty for this group (see Burridge to appear).

2. Setting the scene – grammaticalization and the road to “auxiliaryhood”

Grammaticalization is basically a cover term for what are essentially a number of different historical processes which together work to create grammar. Morphemes or combinations of morphemes shift from a lexical to a grammatical function, or from a grammatical to an even more grammatical function. The shift of an item to increased grammatical status, for example full verb to modal auxiliary, entails interrelated changes at the semantic, phonological and grammatical levels. Overall meaning becomes more general and more abstract as the concrete and specific notions associated with the lexical verb gradually erode away and are replaced by notions of modality. Increasing abstractness, however, does not necessarily mean loss of meaning. Grammaticalization changes can often involve significant increases in pragmatic meaning (cf. Traugott and König 1991 and also Sweetser 1988 who argue against terms like desemantization and bleaching) — a feature of modal verbs for instance, and one which distinguishes them from other verbs, is their ability to express attitudes and judgements which have been taken up by a speaker. On the level of phonology, the increased grammatical status will inevitably mean less stress and ultimately loss of segmental features; i.e. phonological reduction. This sort of weakening is generally accompanied by an increasing dependence on surrounding material. Forms, once free-standing, become less free and more bound. Auxiliaries may reduce to clitics; e.g. *he will go* > *he'll go*, and these over time may then become verbal affixes. With grammaticalization also comes diminishing categoriality — items will typically lose the grammatical trimmings of their category, and hybrid forms emerge. Verbs advancing to modal auxiliaries will lose their verbal characteristics like the ability to take direct-objects and finite clause complements; to form imperatives, passives, nominalizations; to inflect for person, number, tense and so on. With further grammaticalization an item will generalize to more and more contexts of use and the end point can be a shift from optional to obligatory status. Finally, original syntactic freedom will typically give way to a fixing of position and the grammaticalized item will no longer be eligible for pragmatic processes involving considerations of topicality, focus, emphasis and so on.

Characteristic of grammaticalization and its accompanying processes is unidirectionality. Grammatical morphemes don't reacquire lexical semantics. They do not assume a fuller form once they have reduced, nor do they re-evolve the grammatical properties of major categories like nouns and verbs (see discussion Hopper & Traugott 1993:Ch.5). This is what makes Pennsylvania German *wotte* “to wish” such a curious case. Rather than increasing its grammatical status, this verb's shift from modal to fully-fledged verb has been towards **decreasing** grammatical expression; it has seen an enrichment of semantic substance and a return of those morphosyntactic properties which *wotte* had lost when it became a modal verb. But before I address how a change like this could have taken place, I will give a brief outline of the more mainstream Pennsylvania German modals, as they make their way in the opposite direction to *wotte*, further along the more familiar road to auxiliaryhood.

3. Pennsylvania German modals — verbs in transit

Pennsylvania German has seven clearly identifiable modal verbs: *misse* “to have to, must”; *selle* “to be supposed to, to be to”; *kenne* “to be able to, can”; *welle* “to want to”; *daerfe* “to be allowed to”; *maage* “to like to, may” (now rare) and *brauche* “to need to”. These verbs are used to signal the psychological attitude of speakers towards what is being said; for example, they may express a speaker's doubt or uncertainty about the truth of the action or event. They therefore show a wide and complex range of meanings, dealing with notions like truth, possibility, probability, necessity, contingency, permission, hypothesis, desire and so on. To

this group I will also add one of the new future markers *zehle* “to be going to” (from the lexical verb *zaehle* “to count”). Although not strictly speaking a modal verb, it is rapidly becoming the most widely used future marker in Ontario Pennsylvania German, and is undergoing changes which accommodate it more comfortably within the group of modals.

Figure 1 gives the full conjugations two modals *wolle* and *kenne*. The other verbs pattern similarly, except for the newest addition *zehle*, which lacks the characteristic zero ending for 3rd person singular and instead has *-t*; *er zehlt kumme* “he will come”.

kenne “to be able to, can”

Singular	Plural
1. <i>Ich kann</i>	<i>Mir kenne</i>
2. <i>Du kannscht</i>	<i>Dihr kennet</i>
3. <i>Er, sie, es kann</i>	<i>Sie kenne</i>

welle “to want to”

Singular	Plural
1. <i>Ich will</i>	<i>Mir welle</i>
2. <i>Du witt*</i>	<i>Dihr wellet</i>
3. <i>Er, sie, es will</i>	<i>Sie welle</i>

**welle* shows an unusual contracted second person form.

Figure 1. **Modal Verbs**

The following is a discussion of the properties which distinguish these particular verbs from other verbs and identify them as a semantically coherent and well-structured class in their own right. The position that I am adopting here with regard to these modal verbs is along the same lines of many who have examined the history of English modals (see for example Steele et al. 1981); namely, that the demise of the subjunctive mood in Pennsylvania German has helped to trigger a reanalysis of these verbs into fully-fledged modals auxiliaries (note, I do not believe this to be the only motivating force however). For reasons which will become obvious, Pennsylvania German modals are located somewhere in between English modals and Standard German modals in auxiliariness. They are considerably less verb-like than their Standard German counterparts, but lack some of the grammatical properties shared by the class of English modals. I should stress, however, that not all Pennsylvania German modals are travelling along the grammatical road at the same rate. Certain modals like *kenne* and *welle* retain more verb-like properties, like the ability to take direct objects under certain conditions. Such untidiness though has become the earmark of linguistic change of this nature. (See Heine 1993: Ch. 2 who sets up a full verb to grammatical marker continuum.)

(A) *Expression of modal meaning*

These verbs are concerned primarily with modality and therefore contrast with the full semantics of other verbs. Although this paper is not focussing on semantic changes as such, it is nonetheless useful for the later discussion to adopt here a three-way distinction of modalities (like Palmer 1990): dynamic (expressing desire, ability); deontic (expressing obligation, permission); epistemic (expressing possibility, probability).

(B) *Occurrence in post-verbal ellipsis*

In Pennsylvania German, as in modern-day English, the ability of auxiliaries to occur in a range of elliptical structures without their usual complements is a feature which distinguishes them from full verbs. Modals can also occur in elliptical constructions where the infinitive complements are missing. As in English, they require some sort of linguistic antecedent in the discourse. (Note that these do not include sentences where the infinitive complement is supplied from some other aspect of the construction, like an adverbial phrase of direction; *Ich soll ins Schteddel (geh)* “I should (go) to town”). The following are some examples.

- (1) *Nelson bringt sie mit, wann er kann*
Nelson brings her with when he can
“Nelson brings her along, when he can.”
- (2) *Er dut, was er muss*
he does what he must
“He does what he has to.”

Like English, Pennsylvania German has a construction where pro-verbal *duh* “to do” substitutes for verbs in anaphoric constructions like (3 & 4) below. However, examples of pro-verbal *duh* with modal verb antecedents are not found. This presumably relates to the point just discussed; as modal verbs are themselves available for ellipsis, they would therefore not require a pro-verbal substitute.

- (3) *Ich sing, wann du duscht*
I sing when you do
“I’ll sing when you do”

- (4) *Die Leit kriege net all gleich gschwind Pneumonia.*
the people get not all equally quickly pneumonia
E deel Leit dien arrig gschwind. Ich duh nau net,
a part people do very quickly I do now not
awer a Deel dien.
but a part do

“Not all people get pneumonia equally quickly. Some people do very quickly. I don’t now, but some do”

(Note: Standard German does not have an equivalent version of pro-verbal “do”; it is in fact much more restricted generally in the kind of ellipsis it permits. This would appear to be a genuine difference in the behaviour of auxiliaries of the two languages, although a more thorough account of ellipsis is needed to confirm this).

(C) *Verb phrase complements*

The modals generally cannot take noun phrase, finite clause or adverbial/ prepositional phrase complements, but must appear with some other (non-finite) verb in the same clause. This restriction correlates with the acquisition of modal status and the semantic shift from a notional to a more grammatical meaning. For example, the occasional appearance of direct objects with modals like *kenne* “can” and *welle* “will” is limited to dynamic uses of these verbs; i.e. uses perhaps not strictly modal at all (see examples 5 & 6 below). Or *misse* with a directional phrase complement can only be interpreted as “be required to”; it cannot have an epistemic sense (see example 7). In other words, alethic readings (dealing with modes of truth) are not possible in examples without infinitive verb complements.

- (5) *Du hoscht de Rezeet welle*
 you have the recipe will
 “You wanted the recipe”
- (6) *Ich kann Pennsylvani Deitsch*
 I can Pennsylvania German
 “I can (speak)/I know Pennsylvania German”
- (7) *Wann des English stofft alles aus em Haus misst,*
 when this English stuff all out the house must
es daet nimmi viel mehr drin bleiwwe
 there would-be no longer much more in-there remain

“If all this English stuff was required (to go) out of the house, there wouldn’t be much left inside any more”

Standard German modals appear more verb-like than their Pennsylvania German counterparts, in that some (like *wollen* “will” and *mögen* “may”) are still able to take finite clause complements and therefore do not require subject reference identity between the modal and the following main verb. For example, *wollen* can take subordinate clauses introduced by *daß*, whereas Pennsylvania German *welle* must appear with an intervening verb *hawwe* “to have”:

- (8) *De Dokter will hawwe, as ich mene Exercise kriege*
 the doctor will have that I more exercise receive
 “The doctor wants me to get more exercise” (Standard German:
Der Doktor will (möchte), daß ich mehr Übung kriege)

(D) *Defective finite paradigm*

These verbs show typical preterite present morphology; i.e. they lack the present tense third person singular inflection *-t*, but retain a morphologically distinct plural and second person singular (see figure 1 above).

(E) *Defective non-finite paradigm*

A feature which distinguishes modals from full verbs is the absence of some non-finite forms. For one, these verbs cannot be nominalized; e.g. *es Koche/goed Koches* “the/good cooking” but **es Kenne/goed Kennes* “the/good ability”. (Compare Standard German *das Können* “the ability, skill”). They have also lost a distinct past participle form and instead use the infinitive to form the perfect tense with *hawwe* “to have”. For example:

- (9) *Ich hab sell net duh kenne (*Ich hab sell net duh gekennt)*
 I have that not do can
 “I wasn’t able to do that”
- (10) *Ich hab net welle (*Ich hab net gewellt)*
 I have not want
 “I wasn’t able (to do that)”

In this respect, Canadian Pennsylvania German differs from both the dialect spoken in Pennsylvania and also Standard German. These varieties have a morphologically regular past participle formed with a prefix *ge-* and suffix *-t* in those constructions where no dependent infinitive is present; compare examples (9’) (10’) below.

- (9’) *Ich hab sell net duh kenne* (Pennsylvania German, US)
Ich habe das nicht machen können (Standard German)
 “I wasn’t able to do that”

- (10') *Ich hab sell net **gekennt*** (Pennsylvania German, US)
*Ich habe das nicht **gekonnt*** (Standard German)
 "I wasn't able (to do that)"

Many of these losses are undoubtedly due to semantic factors. As these verbs increasingly divest themselves of their original lexical notions and take on alethic notions like possibility, contingency and counter factuality, they will cease to be appropriate in some of the contexts where non-finites are called for. Certain tense and aspectual notions, for example, will be superfluous to the new modals. Not surprisingly, they do not appear in any of the aspectual constructions which have evolved recently. For example, the language has two new progressive constructions, both deriving from location expressions. As example (11) shows, one (the older) uses some form of the verb *sei* "to be" followed by an infinitival substantive governed by *am*, a fused preposition and article, literally, *an + em* "on/at the"; the newer construction uses the location adverb *draa* "on/at it".

- (11) *Sie is am/draa Aerbse blicke*
 she is on-it/there peas shelling
 "She is shelling peas"

Although the older progressive construction with *am* has been extended to include psychological state verbs like *wotte* "to want"; *verschteh* "understand"; *denke* "think", none of the modal verbs are eligible for this construction. The newer construction is much more transparently locative and is therefore restricted to dynamic verbs whose activities have some sort of observable location.

The auxiliary *duh* "to do", in combination with an infinitive verb, is used extensively in this variety of Pennsylvania German to form what now appears to be a new periphrastic present². Modal verbs are exceptional in being unable to appear in this construction. Sentences like the following are not possible.

- (12) **Ich duh net Deitsch kenne*
 I do not German can
 "I don't know German"

However, those modals which have retained more of the specific and concrete meanings from their lexical origins are still able to co-occur with the new future auxiliaries *zehle / geh*. For example:

- (13) *Sie zehlt/geht es duh kenne*
 She count/go it do can
 "She will be able to do it"

Examples like these, and the continued ability of the modals to appear in infinitive clauses (see 14 below), indicate that Pennsylvania German is still some way off abandoning the categorical distinction finite/non-finite for these verbs.

² Although traditionally it has been described on different occasions as iterative (Reed 1947), emphatic and for use in the formation of questions and negatives (Buffington and Barba 1965:26), my material indicates that *duh* is in the process of shifting from what was an original expression of habitual aspect into one of general present tense. (Certainly, *duh* is now often reinforced by the habitual particle *als* or some sort of adverbial indicating repeated time, suggesting a diminished habitual sense; see Burridge 1992, 1995). E.g. *Ich duh als uffschteh in de fünf Uur*
 I do always rise in the five hour
 "I usually get up at five o'clock"

- (14) *Bin ich supposed fer sell duh misse/kenne/daerfe*
 am I supposed to that do must/can/be allowed to
 “Am I supposed to have to/be able to/ be allowed to do that?”

However, as these verbs continue to grammaticalize, we can expect them to lose more of these non-finite possibilities. (See Plank 1984 and Warner 1993 for the interaction between modality and this finiteness requirement in the history of English modals).

(F) *No passive*

Modals are unable to form a passive. Only the verb *welle* “to want” retains vestiges of a former passive, although speakers now consider this archaic; e.g. *?*Ich waar gar net gewellt da* “I wasn’t wanted there at all”. (Note the old past participle form *gewellt*).

(G) *No imperative*

No modals can appear in the imperative form.

(H) *Subcategorization for bare infinitive complements, not “fer-(zu)” infinitives*

In Ontario, the appearance of *fer* “for” as a semantically empty infinitive clause marker is a fairly recent development. As was the case for English *to*, the introduction of *fer* was semantically based, but recent times has seen the prepositional force weaken and the marker generalize beyond the original infinitive of purpose. *Fer* has all but replaced the traditional infinitive particle *zu*, which in Ontario now is rarely heard.

- (15) *Ich hab versproche fer iem helpe*
 I have promised for him help
 “I promised to help him”

- (16) *Sie dumme sich fer kumme*
 they hasten themselves for come
 “They hasten to come”

Although *fer* is now rapidly expanding its contexts, it never occurs after modal verbs; these are unusual in **always** subcategorizing for the bare infinitive. In fact their distinctiveness in this regard has sharpened now that *fer* has expanded to include even those complements of non-modal verbs like *laenne* “to learn” and *helpe* “to help”, which once took the bare infinitive. Their preference now for the *fer* construction in examples like (17) and (18) has had the effect of strengthening the coherency of the modal group (although verbs of perception continue to share this property with them).

- (17) *Laern fer Pennsylvfaani Deitsch lese*
 learn for Pennsylvania German read
 “Learn to read Pennsylvania Dutch”

- (18) *Ich hoff fer dich gleich sehne kenne*
 I hope for you soon see can
 “I hope to be able to see you soon”

(I) *Special preterite subjunctive forms*

Only a handful of verbs have distinct subjunctive forms, and even these are confined to the speech of older Old Order Mennonites. Most verbs express the subjunctive by combining the

subjunctive forms of the auxiliary verb *duh* with the infinitive of the main verb (which appears sentence finally)³.

- (19) *Ich deed gleiche e Kobli Tee hawwe*
 I do-subj like a cup tea have
 “I would like to have a cup of tea”

The modal verbs are therefore distinctive in having retained separate subjunctive forms with person/number endings: singular *-ø -scht, -ø* and plural *-e, -et, -e*. For example: *kenne* “to be able to, can” takes the subjunctive form *kennt-* and appropriate endings.

kenne “to be able to, can”

Singular	Plural
1. <i>Ich kennt</i>	<i>Mir kennte</i>
2. <i>Du kennscht</i>	<i>Dihr kenntet</i>
3. <i>Er, sie, es kennt</i>	<i>Sie kennte</i>

Figure 2. *Subjunctive Modals*

As we will soon be discussing, however, these verb forms now have quite special functions and there is good evidence to assume that they have split off to become separate linguistic units — modal verbs in their own right, independent of their indicative partners.

In sum, modals differ from other verbs by the following properties:

- Expression of modal meaning.
- Occurrence in post-auxiliary ellipsis.
- Verb phrase complements (typically!).
- Defective finite paradigm (no third person singular inflection).
- Defective non-finite paradigm (no past participle; restricted use of infinitive).
- No passive.
- No imperative form.
- Bare infinitive complements.
- Distinctive subjunctive forms (but see below).

4. A split in the modals — preterite subjunctives take the fast lane

As just discussed, the modals are unusual in having separate subjunctive forms. These are the survivors of what were originally preterite subjunctives. As a comparison with their current Standard German counterparts shows (see Figure 3), they have since undergone a number of phonological changes, like the spread of Umlaut for the forms of *selle/solle* and *welle/wolle*. The subjunctive forms *sotte* and *wotte* are no longer heard in Waterloo County, but have lost out to *sette* and *wette*. (The subsequent unrounding of the umlauted front vowel [*ö* > *e*] is a general feature of this dialect). The phonological substance of these two verbs in particular has eroded considerably, with the original [t] cluster now reduced to a medial flap [t]. Note also the very recent analogical shift of *misste* to *messte*.

³ Single form subjunctives exist for *sei* “to be” and *hawwe* “to have”, and for a small handful of common usage verbs like *bringe* “to bring”; *geh* “to go”; *gewwe* “to give” and *komme* “to come”, although they are now rarely used. The younger speakers especially favour the subjunctive formed with *duh* “to do”.

<i>Infinitive</i>	<i>Subjunctive (1 & 3 person plural)</i>	
Pennsylvania German	Pennsylvania German	Standard German
<i>kenne</i> “can”	<i>kennte</i>	<i>könnten</i>
<i>brauche</i> “need”	<i>breichte</i>	<i>bräuchten</i> (non-standard)
<i>daerfe</i> “be allowed to”	<i>daerfte</i>	<i>dürften</i>
<i>maage</i> “may”	<i>mechte</i>	<i>möchten</i>
<i>misse</i> “must”	<i>misste / messte</i>	<i>müßten</i>
<i>selle/solle</i>	<i>sette</i> “be supposed to”	<i>sollten</i>
<i>welle/wolle</i> “will”	<i>wette</i>	<i>wollten</i>

Figure 3. *Modal Subjunctives*

In current Canadian Pennsylvania German, there is good evidence that these original preterite subjunctive verb forms are in the process of splitting off from their corresponding “present” forms, in ways that are reminiscent of the developing independence of the originally preterite forms *would*, *could*, *should* and *might* in English. Increasingly these verbs have been subjected to developments which have had the effect of severing the synchronic ties with their present indicative partners and establishing their own autonomy. For a number of reasons, they are now best considered as separate lexemes. Bybee (1985: Ch. 4) has identified three factors which determine the likelihood of a lexical split of this nature: semantic distance, phonological distance and frequency. These are also likely catalysts in this particular inflectional split.

Firstly semantic distance. As in the history of the English modals (cf. Lightfoot 1979:103-105; Plank 1984 and Warner 1993), the relationship between present and preterite forms has become increasingly opaque semantically. For a start, the preterite and the subjunctive are no longer viable categories in the language and verbs like *sette*, *wette*, *kennte* etc. are among the few remaining synthetic forms. This makes them ripe for reanalysis. The tense-mood relationship indicated by the inflectional pairs in Figure 3 is further obscured by the integration of these verbs into the grammatical system of modality. Preterite subjunctive forms can appear in contexts where past tense readings are no longer appropriate; for example, the use of *sette* to impose a present obligation (e.g. *Er sett nach Mt Forest geh* “He should/ought to go to Mt Forest”). All this points to the fact that verbs like *sette*, *wette*, *kennte* etc. are developing their own independent (modal) semantics, outside the original tense distinctions. The form *sette*, for example, can no longer be analyzed as *solle* + past + subjunctive.

Secondly phonological distance. The split is also facilitated by formal differentiation between the forms. For some of the verbs, the formation of the past subjunctive has always been highly irregular; e.g. *maage-mechte* (this verb is showing signs of a split in Standard German). Additional phonological changes like the contractions of original *sollt-/söllt-* and *wollt-/wöllt-* to *sett-* and *wett-* have also increased their distinctiveness. Such changes have had the effect of establishing greater cohesion within the breakaway group itself. For example, the analogical spread of the unlauded vowels is bringing these verbs in line and establishing them more as a distinct set. The very recent shift of *misste* to *messte* now also identifies this particular verb more strongly with the group through the similarity of the root vowel.

Finally, Bybee’s third factor frequency: Frequent items are more likely to become autonomous. Without a doubt, the high discourse frequency of these verbs has been instrumental in promoting their independence.

Supporting evidence for the independence of these verbs exists in the formation of the perfect subjunctive. In place of expected infinitive verbs, preterite subjunctive verb forms are starting to appear. Compare the use of *solle* and *sette* in the following sentences.

- (20) *Er hot nach Mt Forest geh solle*
 He has to Mt Forest go shall
 “He was supposed to go to Mt Forest (and I expect he did)”
- (21) a. *Er hett nach Mt Forest geh solle*
 He had to Mt Forest go shall
 “He ought to have gone to Mt Forest (but he didn’t)”
- b. *Er hett nach Mt Forest geh sette*
 He had to Mt Forest go should
 “He ought to have gone to Mt Forest (but he didn’t)”
- c. *Er hot nach Mt Forest geh sette*
 He has to Mt Forest go should
 “He ought to have gone to Mt Forest (but he didn’t)”

Examples like (21b & c) in place of (21a) have become quite usual in the language of younger speakers. This is more than straightforward “contamination” or assimilation from the inflected (preterite subjunctive) verb *hett* (which anyway can’t account for example 21c), but is further support for the autonomous status of items like *sette* as individual modals⁴. (Note there appears to be no difference in meaning between 21 a, b and c).

Their preterite subjunctive origin has meant these verbs now actually appear further along the grammaticalization road than their historical partners. For example, despite their occurrence as apparent infinitives in perfect constructions like those above, their origin as inflected preterite subjunctives, would generally restrict them to finite contexts. For example, they are prevented from occurring in non-finite constructions like the following:

- (22) *Ich bin supposed fer sell duh kenne/*kennte*
 “I’m supposed to be able to do that”

They also cannot be governed by other auxiliaries, like the future auxiliaries *geh* and *zehle*. For example:

- (23) **Sie geht /zehlt sel duh kennte*
 “She will possibly be able to do that”

The acquisition of new modal meanings would also render tense marking to some extent superfluous (see Steele et al. 1981:281: “Indeed we find, across languages, that modals are generally not marked for tense”). In the case of (23), something that is logically possible, would also be logically possible in the future; an additional marker of futurity is therefore unnecessary. As modal meaning replaces notional meaning, the need for tense distinctions disappear.

⁴ Donaldson (1993:241-242) describes what in Afrikaans has come to be known as “preteritive assimilation”; i.e. the “use of imperfect forms [of modals] in a compound past tense construction where historically and logically one expects an infinitive”. The preference for these ‘preterite infinitives’ in the construction of the perfect of modals, and the fact that they even appear in infinitival clauses introduced by the infinitive marker *om te* suggest that these historically preterite modal forms have also established themselves as separate modal lexemes. This would also explain their preferred status over the (now rarely used) perfect construction, despite the demise of the preterite generally in Afrikaans. As in Pennsylvania German, these verbs have acquired modal notions which fall outside the historically straightforward tense oppositions.

In addition, it appears that forms like *sette*, *kennte*, *wette* etc. are less willing than their historical partners *solle*, *kenne*, *welle* etc. to take nominal (or directional adverbial) complements. They appear to prefer a non-finite verbal complement.

- (24) *?Sie kennt Deitsch / Sie kennt Deitsch schwetze
“She could German/She can speak German”
- (25) *?Er wett sell/ Er wett sell hawwe
“He would (want) that/He would (want to) have that”
- (26) *?Ich sett ins Schteddel / Ich sett ins Schteddel geh
“I should into town/I should go into town”

5. From modal to lexical verb — *wotte* does a U-turn

“The moment a verb is given an infinitive complement, that verb starts down the road of auxiliarieness” (Bolinger 1980; cited in Heine 1993: 27)

The modal verb *welle* “to want”, as we have seen, is well along the grammaticalization path. In fact it is further advanced than its Standard German cousin *wollen*, which retains a number of verb-like features; e.g. the ability to passivize and to take sentential complements without subject reference identity between the auxiliary and the main verb. In addition we have seen how *wette*, the preterite subjunctive form of this verb, has split off and has established itself as an autonomous modal verb. In fact, it is actually further along the grammaticalization path than *welle*, in having fewer verb-like properties (e.g. it prefers non-finite verb complements, cannot be governed by other auxiliaries or occur with markers of non-finiteness). In Ontario Pennsylvania German the verb *welle* has actually now split a third way. A variant form of the preterite subjunctive *wotte*, which retains the earlier rounded vowel, has also recently established itself as an autonomous verb. But in ways which totally violate the unidirectionality of grammaticalization processes, it has re-evolved into a lexical verb expressing “wishing” and “desiring”. In an extraordinarily short period of time, it has come to replace the lexical verb *winsche* “to wish”.

The history of English has a number of examples of verbs which diverge functionally and split into a modal auxiliary and a new full lexical form; for example, the development of lexemic splits in *can* and *need* in early Modern English (see Warner 1993:201-3). The differences in both form and meaning between the lexical verb *con*, *cun* “learn, study” and the old preterite present (pre-)modal *can* eventually became so pronounced that the lexical item can be said to have split in two: one form with the lexical function of a full verb and the other with the grammatical function of a modal auxiliary; compare also the related verb forms *couth* “learned” and *could*. An analogous differentiation is still underway with modal and non-modal uses of *need* (compare: *Morris dancers needn’t jump*; *Morris dancers don’t need to jump*). These cases show the familiar process of divergence or split, whereby a lexical item (A) grammaticalizes and splits into a grammatical form (B), with the original form surviving alongside as an autonomous lexical item; i.e. A > A / B (> B); see Hopper and Traugott (1993: 116-120). The case of *wotte* is quite different, however. Its particular transition looks something like this: A > A / B > B > C (where A and C are different lexical items). It is not the case that lexical *wotte* has always been around, and is simply strengthening its position by innovating morphosyntactic properties expected of an ordinary lexical verb (as is the case with *con* for example). In other words, it is not simply continuing the original lexical stage, but is actually making its way back from a more grammaticalized stage. In shifting from a grammatical to a verbal morphosyntax, *wotte* has undone all the morphosyntactic changes which it underwent during its transition to auxiliarihood. The following features now identify it as a main verb and distinguish it from the modals *welle* and *wette*:

- *Wotte* has shifted to a full lexical meaning. It has clearly lost all traces of its former modal notions, and like the majority of main verbs now forms the subjunctive with the auxiliary verb *duh* “to do” (see below). Subjects are confined to human referents.
- *Wotte* has left Bolinger’s “road of auxiliariness” and is no longer able to take infinitive complements; e.g. **Ich wott kumme* “I want to come”. Subject reference identity is no longer a requirement; e.g. *Ich wott, du kennscht frieher kumme* “I wish you could come sooner.”
- *Wotte* can appear in non-finite constructions. It can be nominalized; e.g. *es Wotte* “the wishing”. It can also appear in the progressive; i.e. as an infinitival substantive governed by *am*, a fused preposition and article (literally, *an + em* “on/at the”); e.g. *Er is juscht am wotte, er kennt noch eens vun die Ebbel hawwe* “He is just wishing he could have one more of the apples.”
- *Wotte* has acquired verbal properties like the ability to form imperatives; e.g. *Wott mal hart fer sell* “Wish hard for that”; *Wott net fer sell* “Don’t wish for that”. *Wotte* has acquired more typical main verb conjugation. For instance, has innovated a distinct past participle form; e.g. *Er hat gewott, er kennt noch eens vun die Ebbel hawwe* “He wished he could have one more of the apples.”
- *Wotte* is able to be governed by other auxiliaries. It can occur in construction with the new future auxiliaries *zehle* and *geh*; *Er zehlt wotte, er kennt noch eens vun de Ebbel hawwe* “He will wish, he could have just one more of the apples”. It can occur in construction with other modal auxiliaries; *Ich muss wotte, er brauch net lang Schmaetze hawwe* “I must wish, he doesn’t need to have pain for long.” It can occur in construction with periphrastic *duh* “to do”, either in the indicative; e.g. *Er dut als wotte, er kennt noch eens von die Ebbel hawwe* “He is always wishing he could have one more of the apples”; *Sie dien als wotte, es daet besser geh* “They always wish it would go better” or in the subjunctive *Wenn ich juscht noch een Wunsch hett, daet ich wotte, ich kennt aa kumme* “If I had just one more wish, I would wish I could come too.”

This three-way split *welle-wette-wotte* has had the effect of better integrating *welle* as a modal verb, since some of its more verb-like properties have been transferred to *wotte*. This is in contrast to Standard German *wollen* which is the most verb-like of all the modals, and (as described by Heine 1993:74-75) falls closer to the lexical end of the grammaticalization continuum from full verb to grammatical marker.

5.1 How has this split occurred?

The linguistic factors behind this particular lexical split coincide with those described earlier as being instrumental in bringing about the general split between the preterite subjunctives and their present indicative forms; *wotte* was after all originally a variant pronunciation of the preterite subjunctive *wette*. As discussed, the demise of the tense-mood relationship, in particular the weakening distinctiveness of the subjunctive and the loss of the preterite tense, helped to establish the autonomy of these preterite forms. Their independence was also given a boost by their high frequency and of course their phonological irregularity; i.e. the formal distance between pairs like *welle* and the contracted form *wotte* (originally *wollte*). But while the other preterite subjunctives moved in the expected direction of increased grammaticalization, *wotte* moved off in the opposite direction and shifted from a grammatical to a lexical structure. How could this happen? Ideally I would track the progress of *wotte* with respect to its form, distribution, frequency and meaning components, but unfortunately I don’t have the luxury of reliable textual evidence at hand. Nonetheless, I can reconstruct a chain of events, which I suspect has led to the reinterpretation of *wotte* as a lexical verb.

The clue lies in the pragmatic use of the preterite subjunctive to convey reserve or reluctance on the part of the speaker. I suggest that the seeds for this exceptional change were sown in those contexts where *wotte* was used as a cautious and moderate substitute for the indicative in utterances expressing a sense of “wishing”. Compare the current Standard German use of the past subjunctive (the so-called Konjunktiv II) in sentences like the following. The unreality conveyed by the subjunctive can indicate that the speaker is not counting on the wish being fulfilled. (In his Modern German grammar, Curme appropriately dubs this “the subjunctive of modest wish”). For example:

- (26) Ich **wollte**, ich wäre zu Hause
 I wish (pret. subj) I were at home
 “I wish I were home”
 (see Durrell 1991:344 and also Curme 1970:228)

This remote application of the preterite subjunctive (i.e. where it was used with present time reference) helped to blur the original tense-mood distinction of the modal verbs and to establish the autonomy of the other original preterite subjunctives like *sette*, *wette* etc. as separate modals. Warner (1993:148ff) and Plank (1984) also describe the opaque use of the subjunctive as an important factor in the developing independence of English preterite forms *would*, *should* etc. In short, the conditions are just right for the further grammaticalization of *wotte*. So the puzzle remains — why didn’t *wotte* develop along the same lines as *wette* or its English counterpart *would*? To explain this, it is necessary to go beyond purely linguistic factors, to the shared beliefs of this close-knit speech community.

These are a group of people deeply committed to qualities like frugality, equality, sharing, simplicity and especially humility (see Fretz 1989). In particular, theirs is a belief system that totally subordinates self-will and self-love to the will of God. “Wishful thinking” is therefore in direct conflict with their faith. Speakers are quite clearly uncomfortable with a blunt expression of desire or will. It is hardly surprising then that the usual German verb of “wishing” and “desiring” *winsche* has all but disappeared from the language. In its place we find a new verb, whose origins lie in a modal, in particular a past subjunctive form of that modal. The use of the past subjunctive has always had a range of different tentative or remote applications in Germanic. Its element of unreality means it can offer a more indirect, a more cautious, a more modest, a more polite, even a more objective mode of expression than the more pedestrian indicative. For example, by using the past subjunctive a speaker can moderate the tone of a request (e.g. English *Would you ring me?*) and temper a blunt expression of will. For a community of speakers uncomfortable with “wishful thinking”, it is hardly surprising that *wotte*, the “subjunctive of modest wish”, developed as their favourite construction to express desire.

Frequency once more becomes a crucial factor here. As language change shows time and time again, frequent use inevitably leads to a diminishing of expressiveness. In this case, I suggest that frequency has meant that the subjunctive’s element of unreality and its accompanying expressive and emotional force has been lost. (This is in contrast to the usual pragmatic strengthening, in particular increased subjective meaning, of changes associated with grammaticalization; see Traugott and König 1991). Stripped of its pragmatic component, *wotte* itself now becomes the blunt expression of desire and is reinterpreted as a lexical verb with a full sense of “wishing”. This reanalysis is also made possible by the functional and formal decline of the inflected preterite subjunctive in the language.

6 Conclusion

The history of Pennsylvania German modal verbs in general offers a paradigm case of grammaticalization; in particular, the transition of main verb to modal auxiliary. These verbs share a number of properties characteristic of English modals, and are in fact further along the grammaticalization path than their Standard German counterparts. We have also seen how the

original preterite subjunctive forms of these verbs have now established themselves as separate modal lexemes, virtually independent of their corresponding indicative “present tense” forms. Grammaticalization is an on-going process and grammatical functions are expected to give rise to other kinds of (more abstract) grammatical functions; for example, dynamic modality (desire, ability) typically develops into epistemic modality (probability, possibility), as does deontic modality (obligation) (see Bybee 1991; Heine 1993:66-69). The split of *welle* and *wotte* therefore comes as a complete surprise. An originally inflectionally related pair of words has lost its inflectional relation; yet *wotte* (unlike *wette*) does not continue to grammaticalize, but rather re-evolves a lexical meaning and innovates morphosyntactic properties characteristic of a full verb. This is not an instance of usual split; i.e. where an item has disassociated itself from its modal counterpart and simply strengthens its position as a lexical verb (as with English *con* “to study” versus modal *can*). It is not the case that lexical *wotte* has always been around; it does not represent the continuation of the original lexical stage. On the contrary, *wotte* has actually worked its way back from a more grammaticalized stage.

In the case of this three-way split of *welle-wette-wotte*, I have suggested that pragmatic factors arising from Mennonite religious principles have diverted the more usual path of development and produced a genuine counter-example to unidirectionality in language change. The context which allowed this development to take place was the frequent use of preterite subjunctive *wotte* in place of the indicative, as a more remote and tentative expression of “wishing”. The social-ethical value these Mennonites place on the subordination of individual will has given rise to a strong aversion to “wishful thinking” in the community. Speakers, not surprisingly, have opted for the “subjunctive of modest wish” to express their appeals and desires. Its subsequent loss of pragmatic force then triggered (in what appears to be a very short period of time) the reanalysis of *wotte* as a fully-fledged lexical verb, totally displacing the inherited verb of “wishing” *winsche*. Its atypical form already opaque to tense and mood would have encouraged the reanalysis.

What people believe shapes their lives and also their language, especially in this context where religion, society and language are so totally interwoven⁵. Unfortunately, only too often the extra-linguistic dynamics of a linguistic situation are overlooked in accounts of change. Here we have a very clear example of the important role which cultural and social factors can play in linguistic development. Even the unidirectional processes of grammaticalization can be reversed under these special conditions. As “wild cards” in the game of change, they make it impossible to predict the path of change, even one as well-trodden as the path to auxiliariness⁶.

⁵ For the Old Order Mennonites the question of formal language maintenance efforts does not arise. There is no chance of them ever actively propagating the language. For these people it is simple — language and faith are one. One cannot continue without the other (see Burridge to appear).

⁶ The unusual development of *zehle* “to count” into a marker of future can also only be explained by factors which lie beyond the purely linguistic. This future is interesting precisely because it does not appear to fit neatly into any of the grammaticalization schemas identified by Bybee et al. (1991) for the development of future meaning. In Burridge (1995) I suggested the following set of changes: “to count (numerically)” > “calculate” / “estimate” > “to make the basis for one’s calculation” / “plan” (compare English *count on*) > “intention” > “prediction” (i.e. pure future). But to understand why in the first place *zehle* was recruited to express future, we need to take into account the Pennsylvania German speakers’ own world view. One speaker explained that because they live under God’s will, it is never possible to say anything definite about the future — this would be seen as being arrogant. “Mer sett net ganz definitely saage — oh mir dien so und so, weil mir wees nie net. Mer wees nie net was happene kennt” (We shouldn’t definitely say — oh we’ll do such and such. We never know. We never know what will happen). She felt Pennsylvania German speakers were much more comfortable expressing future events with constructions like *Ich figger kumme* “I figure on coming”; *Ich bin am plaenne fer kumme* “I plan on coming”; *Ich bin am zehle kumme* “I am counting on coming”. As she explained, “Mer saage net ‘we are coming’” (We do not say ‘we are coming’).

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