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A Dictionary of Plautdietsch Rhyming Words (review)

Article in *Language* · January 2005

DOI: 10.1353/lan.2005.0009

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A Dictionary of Plautdietsch Rhyming Words. By ELDO NEUFELD. (LINCOM Studies in Germanic Linguistics 15.) Munich: LINCOM Europa, 2002. Pp. vi, 67. ISBN: 3895863629. \$26.

This book, the third in a series by the same author, will not tell you that Plautdietsch is a variety of Low German – also called ‘Mennonite German’ – which is largely unintelligible to speakers of other Low German dialects, or that it is spoken by approximately 400,000 people living mainly in Canada and Latin America. It does not include a systematic pronunciation key, nor even English glosses for any of its entries. And it does not tell you that Homer Groening, father of Matt Groening of *The Simpsons* fame, was a Plautdietsch speaker! Fortunately there is a good deal of information on Plautdietsch on the internet (e.g. in SIL’s *Ethnologue* and under *Wikipedia*). A serviceable online Plautdietsch dictionary is available at <http://www.mennolink.org/doc/lg/index.html>, though many of the words in Neufeld’s rhyme lists cannot be found in this dictionary, even if you are able to derive base forms from inflected ones.

What this book does offer is perhaps best described as high quality and rigorously organized fieldwork data on a little-known language, apparently intended nevertheless for native speakers wishing to write Plautdietsch-language poetry. In his five-page preface and introduction, N addresses the phenomenon of near rhyme, some of the quirks of Plautdietsch spelling, and Plautdietsch patterns of inflection. Following this are 67 pages of rhymes arranged in three columns per page. Each rhyme-category word may have as few as just one rhyming word under it (e.g. only *Mangel* ‘dearth’ is listed under *Angel* ‘fishing rod’); or it may have several dozen words (as under *Ekd/Ekt*, which has 48 items). Some rhyme category headers seem to be actual words, others not.

The rhymes are classified into three types. Section 1 is ‘Monosyllables, and words accented on the last syllable’ (masculine rhyme), for example, under *Ool* are *hool* ‘hold’, *Spool* ‘spool’, *Stool* ‘chair’ and *wool* ‘well being’. Section 2 is ‘Words accented on the syllable before the last’ (penultimate; feminine rhyme), for example, under *Eppeld* you will find *dreppeld* ‘pedaled’, *kjneppeld* ‘clubbed’, and *schneppeld* (not found). Section 3, ‘Words accented on the third syllable from the end’ (antepenultimate; triple rhyme), includes numerous Gilbert & Sullivan-type mosaic rhymes and near-rhymes, e.g. under *OM’pe-äl* are *Klompe Mäl* ‘a pile of flour’ and *Pompestäl* ‘pump handle’.

One thing that really shines through in this little volume is the joy N takes in his unique language. He says that since his childhood in a Plautdietsch-speaking community in Inman, Kansas in the 1930s and 40s, he has played with the sounds, meanings, and prosodic possibilities of Plautdietsch, in addition to writing Plautdietsch verse. An expression of this passionate involvement is found on p. v: ‘There are many Plautdietsch words of three or more syllables in common everyday usage, which simply had to be left out, because no reasonable rhymes, either single words or phrases, could be found for them, much to this writer’s chagrin!’

For the general reader who knows some German, this book is largely a folk-cultural novelty; for Low German dialect specialists, it is undoubtedly a treasure-trove of rare and valuable data. [Karen Steffen Chung, *National Taiwan University*.]