

The Low German Language

The language spoken by our ancestors, was Low German. *Do you have other stories to share with us? Hopefully, this page will help you better understand this dialect. Of course, some of these stories are very old and you have to view them in the context of a former time.*

OGSA will be publishing a book of Low German stories written by Dr. Gerhard Cantzler of Norden. The translation is the work of the late George Heikes. Hopefully, this will be available at the 2010 OGSA Conference in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Languages - All in the Family: Plattdeutsch, Deutsch, and English

Those of us English speakers who have occasion to hear or read Plattdeutsch and Hochdeutsch from time to time have certainly noticed how many words in one language seem to relate closely to words in the other languages. Especially Plattdeutsch and English words seem similar, sometimes having the exact same spelling. So let's examine this unique relationship to see why this is so.

And rather than undertaking a complex study of language history, let's view just one common example to see how Platt, English, and Hochdeutsch interact. A common word that illustrates this is STOVE. We all know that the current English usage describes a heating device used either to warm the room or to cook a meal in the kitchen. And we may not realize it at first, but STOVE in English is historically the same word as STUBE in German. Once you know that, you can almost guess the Platt word is going to be STUUV. But why and how does this relationship exist?

To answer this we go back to the Middle Low German word STOVE. Interestingly, it seems that the original meaning of the word referred to the thing used to heat the room, basically like the word still does in English today. Over time, however, the Platt and Hochdeutsch usage began referring to the area being heated rather than to the thing used to heat that area.

And that remains the current Platt and Hochdeutsch usage today, while English retains the most original meaning, the device used to provide heat. And even with these changes, Hochdeutsch still has the less common STÖVCHEN or STOVCHEN, referring to a "little stove," often with a very small candle, used to keep a pot of tea or coffee warm. (That reminds me. It is time to heat some water on the STOVE for that next pot of Ostfriesen Tee!)

Therefore, we can see that a strong relationship exists, and the major difference in spelling and pronunciation concerns the vowel O having changed to U in Hochdeutsch and the older V having changed to a B in Hochdeutsch. As is often the case, both the vowel and the consonant have remained the same in both Platt and English. If we start to look for other similar words where V's came from B's and U's came from O's, I wonder how many we could find.

Well, my tea is ready, so I will leave you to the search.

SOURCE: Wendell Kurr, German Instructor, Highland Community College, Freeport, Illinois

Saw Corner (Low German with English Translation)

"Bi uns deit elk wat," sä de Jung. "Mien Vader haut mien Moeder, mien Moeder haut mi, un ick hau de Birgen." (At our house everyone is doing something," said the boy. "My father beats my mother, my mother beats me, and I beat the piglets.")

"Dat rukt hier na Minsken," sä de Voss as he in dat Kackhuske raakt was. ("It smells here of people," said the fox as he had wandered into the outdoor biffy.)

"De Wust is mi to krumm," sä de Voss, do hung se hum to hooch. (The sausage is too crooked for me," said the fox when it was hanging too high for him.)

"Dat word leper mit mien Ogen," sä de Knecht. "Vanmorgens kunn ick de Botter up 't Brod neet sehn, un nu seh ick kien Schinke in de Bohnensopp." (My eyes are getting worse," said the hired hand. "This morning I couldn't see the butter on the bread and now I don't see any ham in the bean soup.")

| Enjoy the following Poems: | (English Translation) |
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| <p>(Low German) In 't Moor Still liggt dat Moor, van nahrends her een Lut, Blot Immen summen in dat Heidekrut. Un in de Middagsstünne liggt so warm De Heide, as een Kind in Moders Arm.</p> <p>Dat is de stillste Stünne van de Dag, Wo alles drömt un nicks sück rögen mag. Man ut de Rüsken glitt dat geel un bunt, De Adder stünnt sück up de warme Grund.</p> <p>Do geit dat as een Bewern dör de Lücht, Keen Tiekje kruppt, keen Bottervögel flüggt. Keen Vögel singt, dat is so swöl un still, As wenn up all's een Bann sück leggen will.</p> <p>De Mus, de ewkes noch hör grise Rock Hett putzt, de kruppt verbiestert in hör Lock. Still liggt de Heid, van nahrends her een Lut, Blot Immen summen in dat Heidekrut. (by Toni Wübbens)</p> | <p>In the Peat Bog (Translation) Still lies the moor, from nowhere comes a sound, Just bees are buzzing in the heather shrub. And in the midday sun there lies so warm The heath just as a child in mother's arms.</p> <p>It is the quiet hour of the day, When all is dreaming, caring not to move. But from the reeds it glistens yellow, bright: The adder suns itself upon the heat-soaked ground.</p> <p>Then there's a tremor in the air. No insect crawls, no butterfly weighs flight, No songbird sings, it is so sultry, still, As if the moor is stifled by a spell.</p> <p>The mouse quits grooming its fine, grayish coat, And startled, seeks the safety of its hole. Still lies the moor, from nowhere comes a sound, Just bees are buzzing in the heather shrub. (Transl. R. Wiemann)</p> |
| <p>Wenn ick Plattdütsk hör Wenn ick Plattdütsk hör - us ole Kath seh ick wedder stahn, den Rok ut Dör un Ulenlock gahn, den Rok so blau; de Wittkopp steiht dar, den wi harrn, min Moder seh ick melken un karrn vör Dag un Dau - wenn ick Plattdütsk hör.</p> <p>Wenn ick Plattdütsk hör - de Swengel geiht dal so deep in'n Sot, in'n Kruthoff gleiht den Mahn so rod, un de Lauerk singt. De Wind, de strickt, de Roggen bleiht, min Vater steiht in de Wisk un meiht, un sin Seiß de klingt - wenn ick Plattdütsk hör.</p> <p>Wenn ick Plattdütsk hör, ward't Abend, un de Maand, de stiggt, de Fleddermus un de Kattul flüggt, un ick buten allen. Dat Feld so still, de Welt so wiet un ick so jung - o Kinnertied! - Ick stah un ween, wenn ick Plattdütsk hör. (by Georg Ruseler)</p> | <p>When Platt Speech I Hear... (Translation) When Platt speech I hear - I see our old shack standing there once more, smoke coming through the door and the owl hole, the smoke so blue; the kid stands there with his light blond head, which we all had, I see my mother milking and pushing the wheelbarrow before the dawn of day - when Platt speech I hear</p> <p>When Platt speech I hear - the pump handle goes down so deep in the well, in the greens garden glows the poppy so red, and the meadow lark sings. The wind, it streaks, the rye, it blooms, my father stands in the meadow and mows, and the scythe, it rings - when Platt speech I hear.</p> <p>When Platt speech I hear, the evening nears, and the moon appears, the bat and the barn owl fly, and I out there alone. The field is so still, the world so wide And I so young - o childhood time! - I stand and cry, when Platt speech I hear. Transl. by R. Wiemann</p> |

Here are “Ostfreeske Spreekwoorden um Eeten un Drinken”. (East Frisian Sayings About Eating and Drinking)

Ostfreesland is as ‘n Pankauk, de Rand is’t beste.

- ◆ “ Ostfriesland is like a pancake, the edge is the best part.

Wenn de Muus satt is, is ‘t Mehl bitter.

- ◆ “ When the mouse is full, the flour is bitter.

Is keen Pott so scheef off passt ‘n Decksel up.

- ◆ “ No pot is so out of shape that there isn’t a lid that fits it.

Dummste Buuren hemm ‘n dickste Tuffels.

- ◆ “ The dumbest farmers have the biggest potatoes.

Wat is d’ Korn van ‘t Jahr hart, se Müller - dau beet he up ‘n Muusködel.

- ◆ “ How hard the grain is this year, said the miller - that’s when he bit down on a mouse dropping.

Elker Ding hatt ‘n Enne, man de Wurst hett twee.

- ◆ “ Everything has an end, but the sausage has two.

Arm Mann Pankauk un riek Mann Krankheit ruken wiet.

- ◆ “ Poor man’s pancake and rich man’s sickness reek a ways.

De sück neet satt ett, slikt sück ok neet satt.

- ◆ “ He who doesn’t eat his fill, doesn’t lick his fill either.

Up un satt - noch mal watt mucht, man nix mehr hat.

- ◆ “ Up and full - would have liked more, but had no more.

N halv Ei is beeter as ‘n leege Dopp.

- ◆ “ Better half an egg than an empty shell.

‘N gaude Schwien frett all.

- ◆ “ A good pig eats everything.

Speck un Kohl is gaud för ‘t Fieber - wall för d’ Schmitt man neet för d’ Schnieder.

- ◆ “ Bacon and cabbage are good for the fever - true for the blacksmith but not for the tailor.

Köst ‘n Daler, schmeckt denaa.

- ◆ “ Cost a taler, tastes accordingly. (i.e., very good)

Gar off neet gar, twalm is Middag.

- ◆ “ Done or not done, twelve (o’clock) is noon (meal time).

Word nix so heet eeten as ‘t kokt word.

- ◆ “ Nothing is eaten as hot as it is cooked.

He hett beeter Bohnen up d’ Böhn as schgimmelg grau Arften.

- ◆ “ He has better beans on the attic than moldy gray pea

WIR SIND OSTFRIESENKINDER

Wir sind Ostfriesenkinder und haben frohen Mut,

We are Ostfriesland's children, good cheer is our own trait,

Wir wohnen an den Deichen wo Ebbe ist und Flut,

We live along the levees where tides are never late,

Wir haben keinen Bubikopf und keinen Lippenstift;

We do eschew the pageboy style, the lipstick we forgo;

Das ist nichts für Ostfriesen, ach nein, ach nein, ach nein.

Those are not for Ostfriesens, oh no, oh no, oh no.

Goldblondes Haar, treublaue Augen,

Golden her hair, eyes blue and faithful,

So soll mein Madel sein: Ostfriesischer Art.

That's how my girl must be: East Friesian design.

Kam einst ein fremder Jüngling wohl an des Meeres Strand,

Once trod a foreign youngster upon the North Sea strand,

Der wollte gleich behaupten, hier sei das schönste Land:

He would at once proclaim this to be the finest land:

Hier möchte ich ewig bleiben, hier möchte ich ewig sein,

Here I will always linger, from here I'll never go,

Dort wo die weissen Möven schrein, ach nein, ach nein, ach nein.

Where scads of snow-white sea gulls shriek, oh no, oh no, oh no.

Goldblondes Haar, treublaue Augen,

Golden her hair, eyes blue and faithful,

So soll mein Madel sein: Ostfriesischer Art.

That's how my girl must be: East Frisian design.

Wir Sind Ostfriesenkinder

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OSTFRIESEN JOKES

Submitted by George Heikes

Ostfriesen are famous for their jokes! There are many volumes of them found in most bookstores. First the original version:

DAT MELKJAHR

"Ik loov, du wennst de dat Supen ok neet mehr of!"

"Dat segg neet! Ik hebb malen Jahr lang nix anners as Melk drunken!"

"So, dat kann 'k mi gar neet vorstellen!"

"Man wahr is' t doch: Dat is in mein eerst Levenjahr west!"

"Man! I believe you are still on the sauce."

"Don't say that! Once I went a whole year drinking nothing but milk!"

"Gosh! I can't hardly believe that."

"It's true! That was the first year of my life!"

VERLOBUNG

Papa, Mama, Peter un Anni fohren na 'n Verlobung. Peter sitt achtern be Papa up de Rad un Anni bi Mama.

Peter fraagt: "Papa, wat is dat overhoopt: 'n Verlobung?"

Papa denkt 'n heel Sett na, un dann seggt he:

"Ja, Peter, dat is haast so, as wenn du to Wiehnachten 'n neei Rad kriggt un erst Ostern darup fahren durst."

"So", seggt Peter, "abers durt man dann al mal klingeln?"

Papa, Mama, Peter and Anni were en route to announce their engagement. Peter sat in the back seat by his Dad while Anni and Mama rode in front. Peter asked his Dad,

"What exactly is an engagement for anyway?"

Dad thought about this for quite a while before he answered: "Well, Peter, it's like getting a new car for Christmas but not being able to drive it until Easter."

"So", said Peter, "but I guess its okay to try it out a little bit first, isn't it?"

| LOW GERMAN POEM | ENGLISH TRANSLATION |
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| <p>DE BESTE RAAD By GERHARD CANZLER Harm Bruukt 'n Frau, was nodig Tied He was in de John, was nu so wiet, dat he neet mehr alleinig bleev un sunner Frau dor't Leven dreev.</p> <p>Up elker Fest he sucht'n Bruut man nett wen dat gode gung, weer dat ut, mal harr he Frundskupp, hier mal dar, blot nums blifft an, wat sunnerbar</p> <p>"Up de Fraulu is doch kein Verlaat, Du, Unkel Jann, geev Du mi Raat", meent Harm, "wat denkst Du, wat sall ik maken, Sall ik wat in't Zeitung setten laten?</p> <p>"Naa man," seggt Unkel Jann, "hebb Muut, sook sulvst een ut, ik raa Di good. Wat wullt Du eerst na'd Zeitung lopen, Du musst Du sulvst na een anproten.</p> <p>Mooi Wichter gifft dat hier genoeg. Kiek Di man gode um in d' Loog. Am besten is, blifft Du be Wennst, nimmst Di as Fraau, de Du all kennst.</p> <p>Dat olle Ostfreeske Woord is wahr, hollst Du dar an, dann loppt dat klaar Nimmst Du dien Nahbers Kind dann weest Du, wat Du findst!"</p> | <p><u>ADVICE TO HARM</u></p> <p>The time had come for Harm to wed He's come of age his mother said. No longer ought he spend his life Without a loving, helpful wife.</p> <p>At parties Harm did guile employ To woo the girls, but they were coy. They teased and tattled on Harm's line But not a one fell for his line.</p> <p>Dear Abby, please, what shall I do My luck with girls has fallen through. Shall I place a Lover's Ad For a wife to share my pad?</p> <p>No way, quoth Abby, for it's true Courting is best if done by you. The nicest girls don't advertise They're seldom seen by prying eyes. Our village maids are sweet and fair Their dowers too, are nice to share.</p> |
| <p><i>MOIEN OOSTFREETSENLAND</i> (Low German Song) <i>Kennt de Welt, een moier Lanje, as mien leev Oost- freesenland?</i> <i>An de Diek een golden Bandje, up de Insel süver Sande...</i> <i>Roode Heide für de Immen, Gröön Weide für dat Veeh,</i> <i>Water waar de schkippen schwemmen un dat Volk so stark</i> <i>un ' free</i></p> <p><i>Mien Oostfreesland wull ik leeven, so lang ik no' ammen</i> <i>kann.</i> <i>De heele Welt wull ik weten, dat ik biin een freesken</i> <i>Mann!</i> <i>Soll ik mal wien Freeland laten, bür'gt mi in freeskeken</i> <i>Sand,</i> <i>Dat mien doode Hand kann faten, noch een Stück Oost- freesenland!</i></p> | <p><u>MOIN OSTFRIESLAND</u> Does the world know a nicer land than my lovely Ost- friesland? On the dike a golden band, on the islands, silver sand... Red heather for the bees, green fields for the beasts, Water where the ships swim, and the fold so strong and free!</p> <p>My Ostfriesland will I love, as long as I still breathe. The whole world will I tell, that I am an Ostfriesen man! Should I ever leave my Friesland, bury me in Friesian sand, That my dead hand can still hold, a piece of Ostfriesen land.</p> |

Freesenleed

by Martha Müller-Grählert (1907)

Melody by Simon Krannig (1910)

Wor de Noordseewellen trecken an den Strand,
wor de geelen Blöme bleuhn int gröne Land,
wor de Möven schrieen gell in Stromgebrus,
dor is mine Heimat, dor bin ick to hus.

Well'n un Wogenruschen weern min Weegenleed
und de hogen Diecken seh'n min Kinnertied,
markten ok min Sehnen un min heit Begehr:
dör de Welt to flegen, ower Land un Meer.

Woll hett mi dat Lewen all min Lengen stillt,
hett mi all dat gewen, wat min Hart erfüllt,
all dat is verswunnen, wat mi drückt un dreev,
hev dat Glück woll funnen, doch dat Heimweh
bleev.

Heimweh na min schöne, gröne Marschenland,
wor de Nordseewellen trecken an de Strand,
wor de Möven schrieen gell in Stromgebrus,
dor is mine Heimat, dor bin ick to hus.

Song of the Friesians

Where the North Sea breakers roll up on the strand,
where the yellow blossoms bloom on verdant land,
where the howling gale comes with the sea gull's
cry

there is my dear homeland, that I won't deny.

Rushing waves and breakers were my cradle song,
and the levees watched my childhood come along,
and they sensed my longing and my urgent plea
through the world to fly far over land and sea.

Life indeed has stilled this yearning in my breast,
shown me everything to satisfy my quest,
all is overcome for which I strove and strayed,
joy indeed has found me, but my longing stayed.

Longing for my beautiful, green coastal land
where the North Sea breakers roll up on the strand,
where the howling gale comes with the sea gull's
cry

there is my dear homeland, that I won't deny.

Translated by Rudy Wiemann