The Chair in German-Canadian Studies was established in 1989 with grants from the Secretary of State’s Program for Canadian Ethnic Studies and a group of private philanthropists within the German-Canadian community of Winnipeg. It is located in, and affiliated with, the History Department at the University of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Chair promotes the teaching of, and research into the history and culture of German-speaking immigrants and their descendants in Canada. It interacts with the German-Canadian community in Winnipeg, Manitoba and the rest of Canada through public lectures and the newsletter. The Chair promotes regional, national and international research through conferences, publications and grants.

Grant and Essay Prize Winners

The recipients of the 2008 German-Canadian Studies Research Studies Grants, funded by the Spletzer Family Foundation (Winnipeg), study German migrants’ changing language pronunciation, Russian Mennonites’ High German, the German and Canadian media reporting on the Karl-Heinz Schreiber affair, and set out to compile a directory of congregations with German language services. The winner of the Undergraduate Essay Prize wrote about German-Canadians’ “coming to terms” with the Nazi past. Below, the award winners tell you about themselves and their research.

Esther de Leeuw is writing her Ph.D. dissertation at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh, Scotland. She explores how migrants’ pronunciation of their native language changes after the long-time use of a second language.

The acquisition of second languages is seen as essential from both political and academic institutions. Unfortunately, there has been little consideration towards the preservation of first languages in the case of migrants, neither within European nor North American borders. My research is unique because of its emphasis on pronunciation aspects of first language change in the case of migration. I am interested in finding out whether the pronunciation of an immigrant’s native language (German) is affected by the prolonged acquisition of his or her second language (English). More specifically, I am investigating phonetic aspects of bi-directional interference and first language attrition in the pronunciation of native German speakers who immigrated to Anglophone Canada.

My research is theoretically as well as personally motivated. I grew up in British Columbia, belonging to the second generation of a family who emigrated from the Netherlands. As a teenager, I moved from Canada to Germany, where I lived for six years, graduating from the University of Trier, with a Magistra Artium degree in phonetics, psychology and German. In my Hauptstudium, I spent a year at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. It is of both personal and theoretical interest to me to determine not only whether the pronunciation of a native language changes in a migrant setting, but also to investigate which kind of extralinguistic factors play a role in this process. For example, the type and amount of contact a person has with his or her native language may influence the extent to which the pronunciation of a native language changes.

My PhD studies are based at the Speech Science Research Centre within Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh. I’ve thoroughly enjoyed my time in Edinburgh and thank those at this institution involved in my research, as well the German-Canadian Studies Foundation for supporting my research.
Despite the fact that Russian Mennonites were once very hesitant to accept High German as the formal language, and that Plautdietsch, a West Prussian-based Low German dialect, is until today the primary language of most Russian Mennonites, High German has been an inseparable part of the group’s culture ever since the end of the eighteenth century when it rapidly drove out the Dutch language, and became firmly associated with Russian Mennonite culture and faith. As is the case with most immigrants’ languages in North America, both German varieties used by Russian Mennonites in Canada are being lost and in all probability will cease to exist in the course of the next several decades.

While a lot has been written about the Low German of Russian Mennonites, very little scholarly research has been conducted on the High German of the group. In my dissertation project, I am investigating how High German has been used by the two major waves of Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada, which took place in the 1920s and 1940s-1950s.

Based on forty-nine audio-recorded interviews in High German with members of both groups, my project investigates grammatical specifics of the variety, looks at the domains High German occupied, investigates attitudes towards it, and traces how the situation has changed to this day. Twenty-five interviews with the immigrants of the 1920s were conducted in the 1970s by Henry Paetzau and Stan Dueck and are available at the Mennonite archives of Ontario at Conrad Grebel University College. Nineteen interviews with post WWII immigrants I have conducted for this project will be made available there after the completion of the study.

My name is Ulrike Marie Ehrenberg and I am currently enrolled at the University of Augsburg. I am doing a major in Canadian Studies, and a minor in Political Science. As an undergraduate student, I focused on Canada’s two official languages, English and French, as well as Canadian literature in both languages. Additionally, I broadened my general knowledge about Canadian politics, history, and geography.

As a graduate student, I started to shift my focus to Canadian politics, since it perfectly combines my two fields of study. In the summer term of 2007, I won a scholarship which enabled me to spend one term at our partner university in Ottawa. My fall term at Carleton University gave me an even better insight into Canadian politics, and since the Canadian government is located in Ottawa, I often found myself spending my spare time on Parliament Hill, where I attended Question Period on a regular basis.

While being in Ottawa, the newspapers were filled with new facts on the so-called “Mulroney-Schreiber saga,” a term the Globe and Mail came up with to summarize the “home front victory” (147), to a large degree because the so-called “Mulroney-Schreiber saga” involved Karlheinz Schreiber and Karlheinz Schreiber products. I decided to turn my recent political affair that involved Karlheinz Schreiber appeared to be the perfect opportunity for doing research that would bring about clarification on both sides of the Atlantic.

When I returned to Germany, I decided to turn my recent research into a thesis that would include cooperation of the authorities, media coverage and a different perception that might be rooted in a different mentality or a different political landscape. I want to interview journalists, lawyers, and executives in both Canada and Germany, and write a paper that will help Canadians as well as Germans to better understand the other side of the case.

Ukraine near the village of Chortitza, the first settlement established by Russian Mennonites in the wide steppes of Ukraine on the banks of the magnificent Dnepr. Since the late 1980s, when my family no longer had to hide its Mennonite roots and stories of the past, I developed a deep interest in all things Mennonite and a particular fascination for their languages. It is this interest of mine which led me to studying German at the State University of Zaporizhia, and after I immigrated to Canada in 2001, to doing my Master’s and Doctoral degrees in German at the University of Waterloo, Ontario. Currently, I am working on my doctoral dissertation which is devoted to the High German language of Russian Mennonite immigrants in Canada.

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