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**TOWARDS A SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF THE CONTACT
ZONE – COMPARATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE
LINGUISTIC LEGACIES OF GERMAN COLONIALISM**

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ABSTRACT

This article engages in ‘comparative reflections’ on the linguistic legacies of German colonialism in two locales, Papua New Guinea and Namibia. Drawing on anticolonial theory and its interest in psychology, the discussion focuses on three concepts: acquisition (the process through which linguistic forms become part of an individual’s repertoire), variation (which is an inherent feature of language, but seems to be particularly salient in language contact), and meaning-making (reflecting in particular on processes of mimesis and mimicry; that is, reproduction and resistance). I argue that a better, and more critical understanding, of these concepts is important for theory development in contact linguistics. Throughout the discussion I emphasize the importance of psychology and politics in understanding language genesis, an approach which I term ‘psycho-political linguistics’.

KEYWORDS

Pidgin/Creole languages, Namibian (black) German, Unserdeutsch, language variation, psychology of colonization, second language acquisition

1 INTRODUCTION

Kuba ndikubonile ukwenziwa komkhonzi

Kwinkatyana yedyokhwe.

‘Because I have seen the making of a servant

In the young yoke-ox’

J. J. R. Jolobe (1936), *Ukwenziwa komkhonzi*¹

In 1972, John Gumperz and Dell Hymes published *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. The book has become a classic and established ethnography as central to the sociolinguistic enterprise. The title of the volume emphasizes the idea of ‘communication’: language not simply as speech and structure, but as a cultural formation which reflects and constitutes socio-historical relations. It is from this perspective that I write this article.

Ethnography foregrounds the situatedness of meaning-making and as such tends to resist broad empirical generalizations, including comparisons. This position is most evident in the work of Clifford Geertz (1995: 23), who sees generalizations as problematic because they are not able to capture the particulars – the “resident suchness” – of local contexts. An unease about generalizations and broad comparisons is also characteristic of poststructuralist work, which emphasizes the fundamental indeterminacy of the linguistic sign. Meaning, in other words, is never fixed; it is the result of complex semiotic processes, an interplay between repetition (across time-space) and local context (Derrida 1988). And least we forget, comparison was also core to colonial epistemologies, creating evolutionary hierarchies of people, cultures and languages, and emphasizing – and indeed constructing – difference rather than similarity. These are the epistemological perils of comparison. At the same time, however, comparison is also full of promise. As a mode of reasoning, the identification of similarities and differences “is central to human cognition and meaning-making” (Peteet 2016: 249); it

¹ *The Making of a Servant and other Poems*, by J. J. R. Jolobe. Translated from isiXhosa by R. Kavanagh and Z. S. Qangule, Raven Press, Johannesburg, 1974. Translation slightly amended.

constitutes a core mode of everyday and academic enquiry. Geertz's critique notwithstanding, comparative analysis is well-established in anthropology (see, for example, Ginrich and Fox 2002). In the field of language contact studies – and linguistics more broadly – comparison has long been de rigueur, allowing for the identification of structural as well as socio-historical similarities across contact languages. A recent example of the former is the *Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures Online* (Michaelis et al. 2013); the latter is perhaps most explicit in the work of Salikoko Mufwene (2000) who argued that pidgin/creole languages² do not constitute a structural-linguistic class of languages, but rather a socio-historical class. In most of these cases the comparative method does not consist of strict item-by-item analyses, but rather of an interpretative process that is oriented towards the identification of Wittgensteinian 'family resemblances' (as suggested by Thomason 2016).

In this article I engage in 'comparative reflections' on the linguistic legacies of German colonialism in two locales, Papua New Guinea and Namibia. Drawing on anticolonial theory and its interest in psychology, I focus on three concepts that are relevant to theory development in contact linguistics. Firstly, I look at *acquisition*, that is, at the process through which linguistic forms become part of an individual's repertoire: is pidgin/creole genesis akin to untutored second language acquisition? And what does it mean to acquire a language under colonialism? Secondly, I consider *variation* which is an inherent feature of language, but which seems to be especially salient in language contact. And finally, I turn towards language/communication as *meaning-making*, reflecting in particular on mimesis (the creation of resemblances) and mimicry (the creation of dissemblances) as tools for resistance and speaking-back in colonial societies.

2 BETWEEN CHOICE AND NECESSITY

At the centre of my reflections are two ways of speaking that emerged in the context of German colonialism. These two ways of speaking are: Namibian

² Like other scholars I do not believe that there exists a firm, dividing line between pidgins and creoles. I therefore use the composite expression 'pidgin/creole languages'.

Kiche Duits (or Namibian (black) German)³ and Unserdeutsch (‘our German’, which developed in Papua New Guinea). Of these two ways of speaking Unserdeutsch has been enregistered in academic discourse since the 1980s, especially through the work of Craig Volker (1982, 1989, 1991). More recent work has been carried out, and continues to be carried out, by Péter Maitz and his team (Maitz 2016, Maitz et al. 2016, Maitz & Volker 2017, Maitz 2017). Kiche Duits, on the other hand, has been quite invisible in scholarship. In *The Languages of Namibia*, for example, Jouni Maho (1998: 170) asserted confidently that “the German language does not seem to have spread much outside of the German population”. Yet, as I have shown (Deumert 2003, 2009) this assessment is incorrect, and German has been part of the linguistic repertoires of black Namibians since around 1900.⁴

Unserdeutsch (‘our German’, also called Rabaul Creole German in the literature) emerged in the boarding school context at the Vunapope Catholic Mission. The school catered for so-called ‘mixed race children’, typically born to local mothers with German fathers. While standard German was the medium of instruction at the school, a different language developed in the dormitories, away from the ears of the teachers. Craig Volker (2017: 174) suggests that ‘language play’ might have been important in the genesis of Unserdeutsch:

[T]he creole developed as the children played with language, replacing words in Tok Pisin sentences with German words as older children told stories to younger children in the evening ... it may have been a way of relieving the stress of having to speak grammatical Standard German all day with the teachers.

Discursively, Unserdeutsch is positioned in relation to Standard German (referred to as *Normaldeutsch*): it is described as *kaputtene Deutsch* (‘broken German’), *falsche Deutsch* (‘wrong German’) and *verbrochene Deutsch* (‘shattered German’). High levels of endogamous marriages among former pupils of the mission meant that Unserdeutsch was carried into the home

³ I use Kiche Duits and Namibian (black) German interchangeably. The former is an emic term, but it is not used by everyone; the latter an etic, descriptive term.

⁴ My use of ‘black’ draws on Steve Bantu Biko’s philosophy of black consciousness: “We have defined blacks as those who are by law or tradition politically, economically and socially discriminated against as a group [...] identifying themselves as a unit in the struggle towards the realization of their aspirations.” (SASO manifesto, 1971, cited in Sadat 1999: appendix 1).

environment, where it was acquired by children. Moreover, former pupils settled nearby the mission, and a sense of community – complete with networks of interaction – was thus maintained. Unlike most pidgin/creole languages, Unserdeutsch was never used for inter-group communication; it remained an in-group language and marker of identity, while Tok Pisin was used as a lingua franca. Currently, approximately one-hundred people speak Unserdeutsch. They live mostly in Australia, a country to which many of the speakers had migrated. In addition to Unserdeutsch there existed a way of speaking which Peter Mühlhäusler (1984) discussed under the heading of Pidgin-Deutsch (‘pidgin German’). Pidgin-Deutsch was spoken by workers in Rabaul and other government settlements. The varieties grouped under this label show various degrees of restructuring, ranging from the relexification of Tok Pisin to more mesolectal and acrolectal varieties.

Like Pidgin-Deutsch, Namibian (black) German, emerged in the context of colonial labour. Although there existed, in Namibia, mesolectal and acrolectal varieties – which were learnt at mission and boarding schools – these were spoken by comparatively small numbers of people. The domestic-colonial work environment is foregrounded in the emic term *Kiche Duits* (‘kitchen German’). Speakers also refer to it as *kleine Duits* (‘little German’), contrasting it with the ‘big German’ (*grosse Duits*) of German settlers. Importantly, *Kiche Duits*, or any other variety of Namibian (black) German (cf. Deumert 2009), never became an in-group language, and speakers maintained their ancestral or heritage languages throughout. These include: Otjiherero, Oshiwambo (a cluster of closely related varieties), Khoekhoegowab (also called Nama) and Afrikaans.

Comparing Hawai’i Creole English to the Caribbean Creoles, John Singler (2006) suggests that the former was the result of speaker choice and agency (primarily in the school environment), while the latter were the product of communicative necessity (in the context of slavery). It is tempting to draw on Singler’s discussion of choice and necessity when comparing Unserdeutsch and *Kiche Duits* (as well as Melanesian Pidgin-Deutsch): the former was created, through subversive play, in the dormitories of the mission and remained an in-group language (pidgin/creole as choice); the latter emerged in homes and on farms, and were used primarily as out-group languages (pidgin/creole as necessity).

Yet, binaries – while helpful – are also always simplifications: although *Unserdeutsch* did not emerge in the context of labour exploitation, it was part of a Manichaean world; a system of domination, in which white colonial settlers – including missionaries and government officials – were in the position of ‘the master’ and people of colour were ‘the servants’. The children who attended the mission school in Vunapope were separated – sometimes even bought – from their parents, and settled on the mission station. Later they were ordered to marry among one another and continued to live on the mission stations, where they were assigned work by the missionaries. In an interview cited in Maitz (in press) one speaker, a woman born in 1944, commented on such ‘forced marriages’ and the equally forced assignment of labour: “du hat nix su sagen [...] mission sa du muss [...] whether du will or du will ni (1.3) no choice”⁵. Maitz describes the world, which the children, and later adults experienced, as hostile and racist, a situation that continued under Australian rule. Thus, although it is tempting to see *Unserdeutsch* and *Kiche Duits* as distinct sociolinguistic types – playful in-group language versus master-servant pidgin – they are, I would suggest, more similar than they are different: both ways of speaking emerged in the violent context of German colonialism, and are based on the exclusion and coercion of the colonized, as well as their systematic separation from white colonial society.⁶

Unserdeutsch and *Kiche Duits* were thus embedded in the communicative ecology of colonialism, an ecology which the South African psychologist Chabani Manganyi (1970: 56) describes as follows:

[B]lacks and whites talk down and up to each other ... what seems to do the talking in the white person is the master and what does the responding in the black man is the servant.⁷

Manganyi calls this ‘the master-servant communication complex’, an interactional constellation that is shaped by communicative inequality and an emphasis on issuing orders and instructions. Writing about language and domestic labour, Beatrice Lorente (2017) has argued that such contexts create ‘scripts of servitude’; that is, communicative templates that index and

⁵ “you are nobody ... the mission says you must ... whether you want it or you don’t want it (1.3) no choice” (author’s translation).

⁶ I use ‘violence’ to refer to physical violence as well as to structural and symbolic violence.

⁷ See also Fanon ([1956] 1986: 19): “A white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening.”

reproduce everyday processes of structural domination (for a detailed study of the Southern African context see Cook 1980). Being fluent in these scripts constitutes a particular form of linguistic capital, and allows for economic survival under exploitative conditions. However, performing these scripts comes at a cost to mind and soul: alienation, as Frantz Fanon ([1956] 1986) reminds us, is a common psychological condition in the colonies, reflecting a specific historically and politically grounded sociopathology. Yet, colonial relations were not entirely monolithic. They were ambiguous in their complexity, always also offering the potential for disalienation. There was the need to survive, but there were also fantasies of freedom, an affirmation of agency, a desire to fight against alienation (Manganyi 1977: 56). This ambiguity is visible in practices and discourses which challenged the strict binaries on which colonial power was built. Christine Winter (2017) comments on one Carl Schneider, who had attended the mission school in Vunapope, and who wrote in the 1930s: “Even if not much in life was given to us half-blood Germans, one treasure remained: it is a ‘German-thinking’ and ‘German-feeling’ heart that we want to, and will, retain to the end” (Schneider cited in Winter 2017: 157). Similarly, black Namibians would, at times, assert their Germanness. Phrases such as *wir sin doch duitse jungs* (‘we are but German boys’), *ich bin doch duitse vrouw* (‘I am but a German woman’) or *duits is doch im blut* (‘German is but in the blood’) are not uncommon. They deliberately subvert existing power relations, and challenge colonial racism and racial boundaries. I will return to this in Section (5).

3 TOWARDS A PSYCHO-POLITICAL LINGUISTICS

In her study of El Barrio, a Puerto Rican neighbourhood in New York, Ana Zentella (1997) reflects on what she calls ‘anthro-political linguistics’: an approach to the study of language that pays attention to unequal power relations in society and seeks ways to change them, working towards greater social and linguistic equality. She writes:

By incorporating the word ‘political’ in its name, anthropological linguistics openly declares its intention to discuss the language and politics connection and to make it clear that, whether we chose to discuss it or not, there is no language without politics. (Zentella 1997: 14)

Similarly, I would like to suggest that it is important to develop a ‘psycho-political linguistics’, a field of study that brings together psycholinguistics and politics. In order to understand psychological processes (including language acquisition and language creation), one needs to have a firm grasp of the intimate connections between human psychology and power, being able to understand both the psychology-of-subordination and the psychology-of-domination. This connection between psychology and politics is at the core of Fanon’s work, and has shaped the philosophy of black consciousness (see Hook 2005, 2012; Hayes 2011).

A psycho-political linguistics will be relevant for contact linguists who have long noted the importance of (untutored or naturalistic) second language acquisition for pidgin/creole studies. In the 1980s, Roger Anderson (1983: 6) expressed this position succinctly:

[L]anguage acquisition research and research on pidgin and creole languages [...] share a focus on how the human brain can create or recreate a linguistic system given the basic input made available during interaction.

In other words, the genesis of pidgin/creole languages is shaped by psycholinguistic universals and language acquisition strategies that give rise to early learner varieties. These so-called interlanguages stabilize subsequently as community languages (see Siegel 2008: 41ff.; Aboh 2015: 60ff.; Velupillai 2017: 139ff.). A number of structural similarities have been observed between pidgin/creole languages and learner varieties. These include, for example, copula absence, lack of gender marking and absence of inflectional morphology, lack of movement rules, lexical polysemy, preverbal negation, grammatical multifunctionality and transferred features from the first language (see Schumann 1976; Klein & Perdue 1997). An important aspect of the discussion has been a critique of the idea that learners always strive to reproduce the forms and norms of the acrolectal input. As noted by Jeff Siegel (2008: 42), people do not always wish to speak ‘like’ others (including speakers of the target language), and what looks like ‘imperfect’ acquisition might be a strategy of distinction and differentiation. Moreover, in the context of colonial labour, restricted knowledge might be sufficient for communication. Alternatively, as argued by Salikoko Mufwene (2001), the target of acquisition was for many not the acrolectal colonial norm, but rather the various ‘approximations’ of that norm that were spoken by the colonized themselves (also Anderson 1983: 15).

Drawing on psycholinguistics and theories of second language acquisition has been a productive research strategy in contact linguistics; however, what has been absent from these discussions is an explicit and sustained, rather than passing, acknowledgement of the context in which acquisition took place. In conceptualizing the context-of-acquisition, I draw on Mary Louise Pratt's (1991: 34) discussion of the *contact zone*, as a space where "cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other"; where "subjects get constituted in and by their relations to one another". The contact zone, in the definition of Pratt, is a "space of imperial encounters", characterised by coercion, inequality and domination. It is a place of suffering, and indeed we should not mince our words: slavery, forced labour, genocide, massacres and a fundamental dehumanization of the colonial other were part of the context-of-acquisition. The realities of subordination-and-domination were ever present, and also affected those who have obtained some measure of power within the brutal hierarchies of colonialism. As Fanon ([1956] 1986) reminds us in *The Fact of Blackness*, there will always come the moment when someone shouts 'Look, a black man!'.

In his *Ten Thesis on Coloniality and Decoloniality*, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2016: 11) describes colonialism as a 'metaphysical catastrophe',

[...] whereby the world populations started to be divided according to [...] degrees of being human. This catastrophe can be considered metaphysical because it transformed the meaning and being, particularly of the self and other, along with temporality and spatiality, among other key concepts in the basic infrastructure that constitutes our human world.

Like Pratt, Maldonado-Torres uses the spatial-historical concept of *zone* to capture the colonial experience. He writes about *zones of being human* (the world and experience of the colonizer) and *zones of not being human* or *zones of not being human enough* (the world and experience of the colonized).

Although colonialism is the violent backdrop to all work in pidgin/creole linguistics, it is often an implicit category; rarely foregrounded and made explicit in its brutality and violence. Consider the following comment by Philip Baker (1995: 13), writing about pidgin/creole genesis: "Participants in contact situations, motivated by the desire to solve the problem of inter-ethnic communication, set about creating a new language and succeeded in this endeavour." I am struck and inspired by Baker's choice of words. Notions such as motivation, desire, creativity and success speak to the power of the

human spirit and a narrative of resilience. This feels good and hopeful. But I am also troubled by the functionalist phrase ‘medium of communication’ (whether intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic): isn’t language (as Roman Jakobson 1960 reminded us more than half a century ago) much more than a medium of communication, more than a tool that conveys messages? Language is also poetic, expressive and phatic. And finally, I recall Maldonado-Torres’ words: catastrophe, dehumanization and experiential *zones of not being human enough* (or *not human at all*). How can one think about language learning – and language creation – in contexts where the learners/creators are systematically dehumanized, violated and oppressed, a context which, as Fanon ([1961] 2004: 182) writes, was a “breeding ground” for trauma?

There exists a small but important literature on language acquisition and trauma, focusing on the experiences of, especially, refugees and, more broadly, on language teaching in conflict zones, i.e. areas that experience military conflicts (Nelsen and Appleby 2015). While helpful in some ways, this literature is focused on classrooms (tutored second language acquisition), and directed at providing teachers with the skills to assist traumatized learners by creating safe spaces. However, this work is nevertheless relevant to the discussion here. It has been shown that trauma affects memory, executive control and attention, and as such, impacts directly on language learning (Finn 2010; Gordon 2011; Iversen et al. 2014). Thus, if second language acquisition played a role in the genesis of pidgin/creole languages then it was acquisition-of-a-special-type: the learners were in “a state of nervous anxiety” (Fanon [1961] 2004: 188), coping with the impossibility of remaining themselves while everything about them was denied, devalued and taken away. A psycho-political linguistics would take due recognition of this context-of-acquisition and develop a critical psychology of coloniality, drawing on the extensive writings by anti- and postcolonial writers from Frantz Fanon, Steve Biko and Chabani Manganyi to Homi Bhabha and Ashis Nandy (to name but a few central thinkers in the field).

I realize that by arguing for a strong impact of sociohistorical conditions, I might be bringing back a version of *creole exceptionalism* (see DeGraff, 2005, for an important critique) – albeit a sociolinguistically nuanced one; seeking to complexify, rather than to reduce and simplify. The emergence of pidgin/creole languages was not simply the result of learning-with-restricted-

input, it was also learning-under-violent-conditions, conditions which ultimately had but one goal: *ukwenziwa komkhonzi*, ‘the making of a servant’.

4 EXPLAINING VARIATION

Both Unserdeutsch and Namibian (black) German are highly variable. In his work on Unserdeutsch, Peter Maitz (2017) links high levels of variability to the continued and close presence of the lexifier in the school context until World War II. This created a complex continuum-like situation – a creole continuum – with some ways of speaking being acrolectal, others basilectal, plus a diversity of mesolects in-between. In the case of Kiche Duits, contact with the lexifier continued throughout the twentieth century; many German settlers stayed on when Namibia came under South African rule, and apartheid legislation was implemented in the territory. Namibia gained its independence in 1990, Papua New Guinea became independent in 1975.

Understanding variation – both inter-speaker and intra-speaker variation – remains, as noted by Leonie Cornips and Frans Gregerson (2016), a challenge for sociolinguists. Looking at pronominal variation in Spanish, Ricardo Otheguy (2015: 319) reflects on the nature of linguistic explanations, and suggests that there remains some unclarity about “the theoretical platform on which variationist research is build”. He notes that, even in sociolinguistics, linguistic structures – and the processes that give rise to these structures – are often explained in mechanical terms, reflecting an ontology that positions language as an autonomous, self-regulating system. This, he contrasts with a functional view of variation in which speakers choose variants deliberately to express certain meanings, and engage in acts-of-identity within specific communicative encounters (LePage and Tabouret-Keller 1985). Mechanistic explanations are particularly noticeable in language acquisition research (including its application to pidgin/creole studies): restricted *input*, as a function of *exposure*, is seen as explaining divergence from the lexifier and structural innovation. Similarly, many accounts of the creole continuum are based on the assumption that there exists some kind of systemic pressure: the pressure of the standard, or acrolect, which is believed to *trigger*, in some vague cognitive sense, an orientation towards a *target*, creating mesolects in the process (note that ideas

of target, avoided in accounts of the early phases of pidgin/creole genesis, thus come in through the back door). Even when social explanations are included – such as an aspiration towards upward mobility – these are presented in a rather mechanistic way, i.e. speakers who aspire to social mobility will seemingly inevitably adopt variants that move their speech closer to the acrolect. Analytical predispositions are implicit in the choice of words: *trigger*, *target*, *input* and *exposure* create a mechanistic account of human behaviour. Otheguy contrasts this with what he calls a “motivated view of variation” (2015: 319).

If language use is motivated, then we need to look not only at group identities – which are at the centre of the Labovian variationist paradigm – but also at individuals, and indeed at individual encounters and situated speech events. Traditionally, sociolinguistics, including pidgin/creole linguistics had a somewhat uneasy relationship to individual speakers. This goes back to Ferdinand De Saussure ([1913] 1983) who positioned language – in Durkheimian fashion – as a “social fact”. Current sociolinguistic work, however, emphasizes the importance of individual speakers, whose diverse trajectories lead to different repertoires and practices (Blommaert & Backus 2012, Cok 2012). In the nineteenth century a similar position was articulated by the German linguist Herman Paul, who focuses – inspired by psychology – on the idiolect and individual ways of speaking that are, however, at every moment entangled with broader social meanings. It is precisely the link to psychology that makes Paul an interesting theorist in the context of this article, which throughout emphasizes the importance of psychological reasoning, of experience and affect.⁸ In *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, Paul (1920) reflected, more than a century ago, on the dialectics of group and individual by formulating the following question as foundational to linguistics:

⁸ Psychology was part and parcel of linguistic theory building throughout the nineteenth century, when linguists engaged, especially, with the work of Johann Herbart and Wilhelm Wundt. It was in the early 20th century that linguists, such as Leonard Bloomfield, turned their back on psychology and declared linguistics to be an ‘independent’ science, whose aim is to explain the structure of languages, not the minds and motivations of speakers. It was only with the work of Noam Chomsky that psychology became, again, part of linguistic explanations (Blumenthal 1987).

Wie kommt es, dass, indem die Sprache eines jedes einzelnen ihre besondere Geschichte hat, sich gerade der grössere oder geringere Grad von Übereinstimmung innerhalb dieser so und so zusammengesetzten Gruppe hält.⁹ (§ 23)

Key concepts in this short quote are the phrases ‘besondere Geschichte’ (‘particular history’) and ‘Grad von Übereinstimmung’ (‘degree of similarity’). The conventional binary between the individual and the social emerges as a dialectic, not a dichotomy.

A clear emphasis on the individual is also evident in Sarah Thomason’s (2007) work on the structural limits of language change. Her position is a radical one, reminiscent of Edward Sapir’s ([1938] 1968) discussion of cultural change. Thomason, in her understanding of language change, assigns theoretical importance to both, individual actuation and social diffusion:

[T]he question of the linguistic possibility of a change [...] is settled as soon as a single speaker produces a single instance of the change at a single time. Whether a [...] change will become a permanent part of that one speaker’s idiolect or of the speech community as a whole is then a matter of social and linguistic probability, not possibility. (Thomason 2007: 45).

The dialectic of the particular and the general, the local and universal, is a common trope in the work of anti-colonial thinkers, who challenged the implicit universalism that underlies Northern theories. Thus, Aimé Césaire, writing from the French Department of Martinique in the 1950s, and commenting on modes of argumentation more broadly, notes:

I’m not going to confine myself to some narrow particularism. But I don’t intend either to become lost in a disembodied universalism [...] My conception of the universal is that of a universal rich with all that is particular, rich with all the particulars, the deepening of all the particulars in their co-existence. (Cited in Kelley 2000: 25)

Could it be the case that high levels of variability – a *geringerer Grad in Übereinstimmung* and thus a ‘deepening’ and ‘co-existence’ of ‘all particulars’ – are especially prominent in colonial contact zones? In other words, could it be that the colonial situation – where “cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (to repeat Pratt’s phrasing) – gives rise to new and complex forms of variation and diversity, forms that are the consequence of a sociohistorical context that is shaped by violent encounters of

⁹ “How does it happen that, even though the language of each individual has its own particular history, that there exists a greater or lesser degree of similarity within such and such an assembled group?” (author’s translation).

domination and subordination, a context in which emerging norms and stabilities are constantly disrupted and interrupted?

5 MEANING-MAKING: BETWEEN MIMESIS AND MIMICRY

Semiotic practices, including language, do not only communicate group membership (or a desire for such membership), but they also challenge membership claims, and allow one to express resistance against structures of power. In order to conceptualize processes of alignment (a desire for membership) and resistance, the concepts of mimesis and mimicry are helpful. Mimesis refers to the creation of resemblances and thus replication (Paul's *Übereinstimmung*); mimicry refers to the creation of dissemblances, and thus, particulars (see Deumert 2018 for a discussion).

Jean Rouche's documentary *Les Maitres Fous*, 'the mad masters' (1955), is a well-established point of reference in discussions of mimicry. The film portrays the Hauka movement in Ghana during colonial rule. The Hauka would mimic colonial structures and practices in their possession rituals: the marching of soldiers, their dress, their commands. They would thus enact – call-into-being – the experiential world of colonialism. A particular scene stands out in the documentary: a man breaks an egg over a sculpted figurine that is meant to present the colonial governor of Accra. Cracked on the figure's head, the egg cascades in white and yellow rivulets. Then the film cuts, and Rouche takes us to a different scene, a military parade in Accra. We see the British governor, wearing a hat with a plume that looks uncannily like the egg rivulets on the figurine. This is the space of mimicry: not replication and repetition of the colonial order, but motivated variation of the original, a variation which is subversion and critique. How can this line of thinking be helpful in our comparative analysis of Unserdeutsch and Kiche Duits?

Above I mentioned Singler's work on *creole as choice* versus *creole as necessity*, and one might be tempted to link subversive processes of mimicry to creole as choice (the deliberate and creative distortion of the colonial language, exemplified in Unserdeutsch), and processes of mimesis and replication to creole as necessity (the forced acquisition of the colonial language for out-group communication, exemplified in Kiche Duits, as well as Pidgin-German described by Mühlhäusler). However, choice – that is

agency and creativity – also played a role in the latter contexts (as Baker reminds us), and the binary of choice-necessity does not allow us to capture fully the complexities of colonial situations.

Let me return to the earlier made observation, namely, that Namibian (black) German was, by and large, invisible to white Namibians. When I did my fieldwork in 2000 and 2001, it was common for employers not to be aware of the fact that their workers spoke and understood German at quite high levels of proficiency. Certainly, they knew that their workers spoke ‘some’ German; *ein bisschen* (‘a little bit’) or *ein paar Worte* (‘a few words’) were common expressions. This is also reflected in Jason Owens’ (2008: 236) assessment that black Namibians would speak “an accented functional German” with “a vocabulary largely limited to the dealings of that business”. Yet, the over 120 speakers who I interviewed were all able to discuss a wide range of topics in German: they narrated stories of their childhood and family, we discussed the history of Namibia, colonialism and apartheid, politics and social change, they told me African folk tales and explained a wide range of cultural practices, ranging from dress to food, from wedding ceremonies to initiation rites. Their language, while showing varying degrees of restructuring and innovation, was certainly not limited to “dealings in that business”; it was rich, nuanced and expressive. And their linguistic skills were well known in the communities where they lived: specific speakers were pointed out to me as ‘good speakers’, as people I should speak to, people I should record.

What happened? Why were employers not aware of the linguistic skills of their workers? Two things happened. One is racism, the disrespect and disregard for black people, whose skills and knowledges remain quite commonly unacknowledged and invisible. The other one is camouflage. Living in an oppressive and violent colonial, and later apartheid, society meant that one needed to do what one could to survive. And knowledge can be power. Letting the German employers believe that one could speak only a little – and also understand only a little – was a typical “weapon of the weak” (Scott 1985). It tricked the colonial settler into speaking freely in front of workers and domestic servants, and this could mean access to information. The novelist-philosopher Édouard Glissant (1989, 1997) speaks about the “ruses of the creole” – the ways in which language can be used to conceal, to turn the master’s language against the master, outwitting them and protecting

oneself in the process (cf. Britton 1999: 146ff.). There is clearly an element of choice here, of motivated and strategic action.

Let me return to the reflections on colonial trauma. Learning the language of the colonizer – the language of those who have come to take lands and livelihoods – brings with it images of force and oppression, of being made to speak the language of those one wishes to fight against. It reminds one of Fanon's ([1956] 1986) *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he discusses the “inferiority complex” of the colonized: a desire for the colonial language which leads to a loss of self. Yet, others (such as Glissant as well as the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe) have emphasized the subversive potential of speaking the colonial language. Let me illustrate this subversive potential with a non-linguistic example: the story of top hats in colonial Namibia. It happened in Windhoek in 1913, when the missionary Gustav Becker entered his church to perform a wedding, and every man in the congregation wore a top hat, thus openly defying the recently issued order to abstain from wearing top hats in church. Becker reported back to his superiors:

All the young people came with top hats, while usually only two or three or the bridegroom came with top hats. This was open resistance. (Missionary Gustav Becker, Rheinische Mission Windhoek, 1913; cited in Prein 1994: 118).

Becker and the Rhenish Mission were acutely aware of the symbolic meaning of top hats: they were not just a piece of European clothing, but an item associated with wealth, authority and power. Thus, the wearing of top hats challenged colonial rule and structures of authority. It was, in the words of Becker, “open resistance”. Similarly, one can argue, that speaking German reflected more than an aspirational (and ultimately futile) ‘white mask psychology’, it was also a challenge to the colonial order. While comprehending and following commands was expected within the master-servant communication complex (and required only rudimentary linguistic knowledge), being able to articulate oneself in the colonial language beyond the necessities of communication, challenged the monologue of the master's voice; the *damnés* asserted their right to speak back.

In 1913, the year of the top hat episode, the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama was still a vivid memory. Those who survived were forced into wage labour, and colonial laws required that they had to work for German colonists from age seven. Socialization into colonial power structures thus started in childhood, and resistance to colonial rule seemed all but broken.

Yet, it never disappeared and new forms of political action emerged: strikes and go slows, as well as a multitude of everyday resistances (Katjavivi 1988). It is in the after-war years, that Namibian (black) German took shape, always in tandem with other cultural practices of the contact zone. These included not only top hats but also the wearing of German-style military uniforms by men, and colourful colonial dresses by women (for further discussion see Deumert 2009). These practices – ways of dressing and ways of speaking – emerged in the aftermath of the war and, especially, in urban spaces. In the early 2000s, these practices were still present. German was used among black Namibians, who were in their 60s and older, in subversive ways, never as a main language of communication, but as a way to play around, to mimic employers, to turn deference into resistance. Namibian (black) German was not simply a solution to the exigencies of communication, not simply a medium for work-related out-group communication – just like wearing a top hat was not simply an item of clothing. It was a language that was – like the top hats, military uniforms and colonial dresses – entangled with the experience of colonialism and articulated, at the same time, resistance to precisely this history. It was a language that is inherently multivocal: the language of the Other and the language of the-self-shaped-by-the-Other, making visible to the Other the violence they have done, reminding them of it and challenging their power at the same time.

And this had structural consequences. Just like the top hats had to be recognizable as top hats to challenge the missionary's power, so did speaking German need to be recognizable as 'German'. It did not have to be perfect mimesis – variation did not distract from the overall impression it conveyed, and perhaps it allowed speakers to find the self-in-the-Other, reflecting their histories, biographies and agencies. Thus, despite the presence of diverse and typologically distinct substrate languages, Namibian (black) German did not exhibit the high levels of structural opacity, which Enoch Aboh (2015) describes for complex, multilingual contact situations in his work on hybrid grammars. The structure of Namibian (black) German is a reflection of its meaning; it cannot be explained solely in terms of population dynamics, substrate languages, patterns of interaction or the continued presence of the acrolect. Namibian (black) German was not simply a master-servant pidgin, functionally restricted to the work context, but rather a neo-African language,

reflecting a complex engagement with the realities of colonialism (as Gilman 1971 has argued for West African pidgin).

To return to comparative reflections: in terms of linguistic structure, both *Unserdeutsch* and Namibian (black) German share two central characteristics: (i) their linguistic form is recognizably German, and (ii) they are, according to the literature, characterized by high levels of variation. I have suggested that (i) results from the meaning these varieties carried in the context of colonialism: in order to work as appropriations and challenges to the colonial order, they had to be recognizably ‘German’. (ii) should not be seen as simply the result of systemic factors and pressures, but rather be understood as reflecting motivated choices within specific contexts. These choices – and here I depart from a group-based sociolinguistics – do not necessarily reflect existing identities (or draw on social indexicals to establish social personae), but are also always individual responses to a social situation that, to return to Maldonado-Torres, was a ‘metaphysical catastrophe’. I realize that my suggestions, as made within the confines of this article, are mainly of a theoretical-programmatic nature. Yet, they are grounded in a large literature on colonialism and trauma, language learning and trauma, as well as a renewed theoretical engagement with idiolects. All these require, as suggested in Section (3), an orientation which I call psychopolitical linguistics.

6 CONCLUSION: DELIBERATE LANGUAGE CHANGE

Thomason (2000, 2007) has long argued that deliberate, and indeed conscious, linguistic change plays a greater role in language history than linguists have commonly believed. She notes that:

The circumstances under which speakers make deliberate changes in their language are not confined to a need or desire for new words or a need or desire to sound more like people of a higher social class. There is a much broader range of circumstances, and a much deeper range of deliberate structural changes, than has generally been recognized. (Thomason 2007: 45)

While her own work focuses on languages contact, it does not explicitly draw on examples from pidgin/creole linguistics. Yet, pidgin/creole languages are particularly relevant to this discussion: they are not simply contact languages,

but languages that emerged in a socio-historical and psycho-political context that was permeated by experiences of colonial violence. This experience shaped not only language acquisition (understood as a cognitive-psychological process), but also language creation (understood as an agentive process). With regard to *Unserdeutsch*, the creative aspect is clearly visible and acknowledged in the literature. Namibian (black) German is somewhat more complex. In many ways its genesis is reminiscent of prototypical pidgins: the development of a medium for inter-ethnic communication in a colonial society via processes of untutored second language acquisition. However, it also played a role beyond the confines of the master-servant communication complex, and was used to challenge precisely this communicative constellation. In both cases language creation involved the interplay of similarity and difference: the resulting way of speaking is recognizably ‘German’, but at the same time it was not really ‘German’, and thus a challenge to the Manichaean world of colonialism.

The South African psychologist Manganyi, who I have cited earlier, reflects in his work on the importance of time, of the interlinking of past-present-future – a theme that is also of concern to language historians. Understanding language change is not just about past-present, but also about our linguistic futures, and the creativity that shapes them. In looking at communicative acts in the context of colonialism, it is important to listen carefully. To hear the nuances of meaning one should listen with what Manganyi calls “the third ear” (1977: 55). I would like to suggest that in pidgin/creole studies we need to listen with the third ear, an ear that is attuned not only to the colonial violence that gave rise to these language, but also to the ways in which these languages are creative responses to the suffering of past-present, and – at the same time – imagine new futures. I started this article with J. J. Jolobe’s poem *The Making of a Servant*. Let me also end with it, with a line from the last stanza: “Hope lies in action aimed at freedom”.

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