



Journal of the Linguistic Society of Papua New Guinea  
ISSN 0023-1959

**Special Issue 2017**

**Péter Maitz & Craig A. Volker (eds.):  
Language Contact in the German Colonies:  
Papua New Guinea and beyond**

**GERMAN IN NAMIBIA: A VITAL SPEECH COMMUNITY  
AND ITS MULTILINGUAL DYNAMICS<sup>1</sup>**

***Heike Wiese<sup>1</sup>, Horst Simon<sup>2</sup>, Christian Zimmer<sup>2</sup>,  
Kathleen Schumann<sup>1</sup>***

<sup>1</sup>University of Potsdam, <sup>2</sup>Freie Universität Berlin

heike.wiese@uni-potsdam.de

horst.simon@fu-berlin.de

christian.zimmer@fu-berlin.de

kathleen.schumann@uni-potsdam.de

**ABSTRACT**

Among (post-)colonial varieties of German, Namibian German is a particularly interesting case. It has a unique status compared to the other extra-territorial varieties as well as to those in the German-speaking area in Europe. First, it is based on a speech community with German ancestry who still live in Namibia today, which distinguishes it from such colonial varieties as *Unserdeutsch* in the South Pacific and makes it more similar to such German ‘language island’ varieties as, e.g., Texas German in the United States or the German varieties still spoken in Brazil. Second, though, unlike language island varieties as well as other postcolonial varieties and more similar to those in Germany, Namibian German is linguistically vital. It is passed on to younger generations and is also used in public domains, supporting, e.g., register differentiation. Third, unlike most varieties in Germany, however, it is integrated in a setting of societal multilingualism, with speakers who routinely use two or more languages in addition to German in their daily lives, and with a broader context of high linguistic diversity, offering a wealth of language contact opportunities. In this paper,

---

<sup>1</sup> Our research is funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG, German Research Foundation) – WI 2155/9-1; SI 750/4-1.

we describe this special status of Namibian German and present first results from a project that capitalises on this to investigate the (socio-)linguistic dynamics that this setting supports, affording us a spotlight on tendencies of language attitudes and language variation in contact situations of German.

### **KEYWORDS**

Namibian German, language islands, multilingualism, contact-linguistic transfer, language attitudes, corpus compilation, particles

### **1 NAMIBIAN GERMAN AS AN EXCEPTION AMONG (POST-)COLONIAL AND ‘LANGUAGE ISLAND’ VARIETIES**

(Post-)colonial settings have led to a diversification of such European languages as English, French or Spanish. Initially brought into a colonised country by force, spoken by European colonisers and used as official languages, e.g., in administration and education, they often spread to other speaker groups. As a result, they might still be part of the country’s linguistic landscape today, where they are set in a language contact situation with autochthonous languages, as is the case, e.g., for English in India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc., French in Cameroon and Madagascar etc., or Spanish and Portuguese in Latin America. Compared to this, German hardly plays any role in such postcolonial settings today. In most former German colonies, the German language is completely vanished today (with the possible exception of proper names and some loan words; cf. e.g., Engelberg & Stolberg, this volume, for the South Pacific). Namibia is the only former colony where German still has some public significance.

The same is true, albeit to a lesser extent, for ‘language island’ varieties of German that emerged independently of colonialisation, as a result of emigration (partly since the Middle Ages) from German-speaking areas of Central Europe to areas in what are now, e.g., Italy, Romania, Russia, Brazil and the USA. Today, these countries are in many respects strongly influenced by a monolingual habitus (similarly to Germany), and accordingly

characterised by dominant majority languages. In such settings, German as a heritage language has often declined to the point of imminent language death.

In many cases, German was initially maintained not only as an informal language for communication at home, but also supported through such formal, public contexts as education and religious worship, that is, it was used in school classes and in church congregations and services. After World Wars I and II, and for a variety of reasons, not least as a consequence of Germany's war crimes and the Holocaust, however, the German language faced massive sociocultural and political devaluation, leading to its displacement, first, in the public, and then also in the private sphere. In Central and Eastern Europe, the decline of German was further augmented by population movements in the wake of the immense social and political changes after 1945 and after 1990, which substantially affected the German-speaking communities.<sup>2</sup> An exception to this general picture is found in some American sectarian communities. In those language islands, German is still vital and passed on to subsequent generations. A case in point is, e.g., Pennsylvania Dutch, which is used in some communities as an everyday language by young and old speakers alike. However, even here, the language of schooling is English (Johannessen & Salmons 2015b).

Against this background, Namibian German provides a unique case. It is based on a colonial past, but unlike other (post-)colonial varieties, it has a speech community with German ancestry who still live in Namibia today. In this respect, it resembles contemporary language island varieties. However, in contrast to current (post-)colonial and/or language island varieties of German alike, it is linguistically vital and supported by a speech community that actively uses German in informal as well as formal contexts: while German is a minority language in Namibia, it is not restricted to communication in the private sphere, but is also used in public domains, drawing on institutional support in education (kindergarten, school), worship (church), and media, and is salient in some areas of business, most notably in tourism, which is a major economic factor in Namibia, but also in others, e.g., as a working language in pharmacies (cf. also Ammon 2015).

---

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g., Keel & Mattheier (2003) and Behrend & Knipf-Komlósi (2006). For a detailed overview of the present situation cf. Ammon (2015); for specific examples, Boas (2003; 2009) on Texas German, contributions in Johannessen & Salmons (2015a) on German and other Germanic languages in Northern America; Eichinger, Plewnia & Riehl (2008) on Central/Eastern Europe.

This vitality and the broad range of private and public usage contexts makes Namibian German particularly interesting for investigations into language perception and language development, including register differentiations, and patterns of variation and change. Namibian German is spoken in a profoundly multilingual speech community, by speakers who actively use other languages as part of their daily interactions. In contrast to that, as is typical for many European countries, Germany is characterised by a strong monolingual bias, where multilingualism is perceived as a challenge, and such multilingual practices as, e.g., code switching and mixing, borrowing, and transfer are regarded as problematic deviations from a monolingual norm (cf., e.g., Gogolin 1994). This is a comparatively recent phenomenon, however, going back to the historical stage of European nation-state building in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and in present-day Germany – again, similarly in other European countries – some multilingual normality is brought back through urban neighbourhoods with speech communities encompassing a broad range of heritage language speakers (in addition to ones with a monolingual German background), and supporting such new urban contact dialects as ‘Kiezdeutsch’ “(neighbour-)hood German” (cf. Wiese 2012; 2013b).

Like Namibian German and other (post-)colonial and/or language island varieties, these urban contact dialects are younger than traditional regional dialects (e.g., Bavarian and Swabian) and emerged in language contact settings, which makes them particularly dynamic. However, outside academia the emergence of new contact dialects in Europe is typically regarded as a social and linguistic problem rather than an enrichment, and the public discourse on these dialects, e.g., in Germany is dominated by strong rejection and devaluation, and an Othering of their speakers (Wiese 2015).

In contrast to this, Namibia, similar to other African countries, is characterised by a societal multilingualism where speakers are expected to regularly use different languages, and multilingual practices are acknowledged as ordinary linguistic behaviour (cf. Wiese (to appear) on a comparative discussion of European and African settings). As a result, Namibian German benefits from a multilingual speech community that is set in a linguistically diverse broader societal context with a characteristic openness to language variation and innovation. The fact that it is geographically removed from the majority language setting of German, and

hence less subject to the retarding influence of its standard norm,<sup>3</sup> further adds to its linguistic dynamicity.

## 2 GERMAN IN A LANGUAGE-CONTACT SETTING IN NAMIBIA

German was brought to Namibia in the context of colonialisation, and it was the official language from 1884 to 1915 when Namibia was a German colony (*Deutsch-Südwestafrika* ‘German South-West-Africa’). There was a crucial difference, however, to the situation in Melanesia: Whereas most German colonies, including those in the South Pacific, were regarded as mere “Ausbeutungskolonien”, i.e. ‘exploitation colonies’, South-West Africa was conceived of as a “Siedlungskolonie” ‘settler colony’. This resulted in a completely different socio-political and administrative setting – most notably, of course, the fact that whole German-speaking families settled in South-West Africa (in contrast to mostly administrative personnel, missionaries etc. in Melanesia); hence the seedling for the long-term survival of a speech community was planted.<sup>4</sup> After the occupation by South Africa, which started in 1915, German was first replaced by Afrikaans and English in 1920, and in 1984 added to these as a third official language of the (white) executive. Since independence in 1990, English is the only official language in Namibia, while Afrikaans is often used as a lingua franca (cf. Deumert 2009 for an historical overview of German in Namibia). It should be kept in mind, of course, that the vast majority of Namibians (ca. 85% of the population) use a language autochthonous to the area as a first language (cf. Böhm 2003: 525 for a brief overview of the complex multilingual situation).

Today, German is used as a first language in a closely-knit speech community that has its roots in immigration from Germany (most notably from, but not limited to, the Northern area, cf. Böhm 2003: 564) and encompasses approximately 20,000 speakers, which is about a quarter of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Note, though, that there is some influence coming from German schools in Namibia, several of which are supported by Germany both financially and through teachers of German as a school subject, who are sent to Namibia from Germany.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Warnke (2009) for an overview of German colonial policy; for a recent description of the colonial situation in German-ruled Melanesia and its relevance for the German language there cf. Maitz (2016) and the literature cited therein, in particular Voeste (2005). Cf. also Weigend (1985) for population geographic information.

population with European background (Pütz 1991).<sup>5</sup> Most speakers are also fluent in Afrikaans and English and use those on a regular basis in communication outside the German-speaking community. In addition, some speakers have competences – to differing degrees – in African-Namibian languages (such as Herero, Nama/Damara, or Oshiwambo). These are sometimes acquired from an early age on, especially on farms, when children of German-speaking landowners interact with those of employees with an African-Namibian background.

The setting for German in Namibia is thus characterised by intense language contact at micro and meso levels of its speakers and the speech community as well as at the macro level of the broader society. The multilingual context of Namibian German has an influence especially on informal spoken registers. While formal registers are fairly close to Standard German in Germany, vernacular language use points to a Namibia-specific version of German that deviates from this in interesting ways. Among younger speakers, this kind of language use is often referred to as *Nam Släng* – a term made popular by the German-Namibian musician ‘EES’ (Sell 2011) – whereas the older generation tends to speak of *Südwesterdeutsch* ‘South-Westerners’ German’ (Gretschel 1995, Pütz 1991), relating to Namibia’s former colonial name. In addition, speakers use the term *Namdeutsch* ‘Nam-German’ as an overarching, more neutral term, which accordingly we will also use here.

Previous research points to lexical transfers, in particular from Afrikaans and English, as a salient characteristic of *Namdeutsch* (Nöckler 1963, Kleinz 1984). Compared to this, grammatical effects of the language-contact setting seem to be less salient and, accordingly, not as well researched so far. While there are a number of studies with historical perspectives on Namibian German, in particularly relating to colonial times (cf. Warnke 2009), there are hardly any systematic empirical investigations of contemporary language use in informal situations. Research available so far focusses primarily on the lexical influence of Afrikaans and English.

---

<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, there is a (dying) German-based contact variety called *Kiche Duits* (‘Kitchen German’), which was primarily used for inter-ethnic communication and which is nowadays replaced by the lingua francas English and Afrikaans (cf. Deumert 2009).

The following sentences from spoken language, taken from Shah (2007: 25), give an example for such non-canonical patterns (in bold), which Shah explains as interferences from Afrikaans ('om ... te') and English ('to look for'), respectively:

- (1) *Ich habe keine Lust, **um** morgen in der Schule **zu** gehen.*  
 I have no desire for tomorrow in the school to go  
 'I don't feel like going to school tomorrow.'  
 (Standard German: 'Ich habe keine Lust, morgen in die Schule zu gehen.')
- (2) *Ich habe **für** ihn gesucht.*  
 I have for him searched  
 'I looked for him.'  
 (Standard German: 'Ich habe ihn gesucht.')

Note, though, that we are talking about genetically closely related Germanic contact languages here, with – particularly in the case of Afrikaans – many structural similarities. Accordingly, it can often be difficult to tease apart genuine transfer from internal developments in German. A case in point is the dative possessive illustrated in (3) (from Shah 2007: 28), which can be used in Namdeutsch instead of the Standard German genitive construction:

- (3) *meinem Freund seine Schwester*  
 my.DAT friend.DAT his sister  
 'my friend's sister.'  
 (Standard German: 'die Schwester meines Freundes')

Shah (2007) interprets this non-canonical usage as an interference from Afrikaans, which has a superficially similar construction ("my vriend se suster"). However, so does European German: while this construction is not part of Standard German, it is systematically used in informal language throughout the German-speaking area (e.g., Zifonun 2003). This makes a classification as an interference from Afrikaans less plausible.<sup>6</sup> It does not

---

<sup>6</sup> In a similar vein, cf. also Poplack & Levey (2010) for a similar argumentation concerning French in Canada and France.



necessarily mean, though, that contact with Afrikaans does not play a role at all here. Quite possibly, the use of the dative possessive in Namdeutsch, while drawing on language-internal patterns, might be further supported by the salient availability of a parallel pattern in Afrikaans, suggesting an interesting interaction of internal and contact-induced dynamics. Further support for such a possibility comes from Namdeutsch patterns that are initially based on lexical borrowing, but in the course of integration follow a path of their own that is not motivated by language contact. An example is a characteristic use of *job* in Namdeutsch, as illustrated in (4):

- (4) *Das jobbt für mich*  
 that jobs.3SG for me  
 ‘That {works for/suits} me.’

While the original source of *job* is presumably English, this element has taken on its own syntax and semantics as a Namdeutsch verb. Drawing on a new meaning ‘to suit/work for someone’, it subcategorises a theme and a beneficiary in the form of a subject and a prepositional phrase headed by *für* ‘for’. In the English source, a similar construction is available for *work* (illustrated in the idiomatic translation for (4) above), but not for *job*, despite its semantic closeness to *work*. This points to a development that is initially based on transfer, but then takes on its own dynamics, drawing on semantic links in the source language, but ultimately resulting in a novel pattern.

This suggests at least two contact-linguistic processes at work in Namdeutsch: borrowing from contact languages (both lexical and pattern borrowing), and internal developments that are initially triggered by direct transfer, but lead to novel constructions that did not exist in either the source or the receiving language. In addition, we might also expect to see a third route to non-canonical developments, in view of previous findings on German in other multilingual speech communities in Germany, in particularly on urban contact dialects (see section 1 above). For such contact dialects as Kiezdeutsch, previous research points to a number of developments that are based on internal tendencies within German, but can be expanded – quantitatively or qualitatively – in a multilingual speech community. In such cases, it is not so much the opportunity to borrow specific elements, but rather the general dynamics of a multilingual setting

that support such developments: language contact provides a context that is particularly open to variation and change and thus favourable to non-canonical developments and linguistic innovations (cf. Wiese 2013a). In Namdeutsch, such internal developments would be particularly interesting to investigate, given the special characteristics of its language-contact situation: internal developments in German could be further supported here by parallels in closely related Germanic contact languages, as might be the case for the dative possessive construction discussed above.

### **3 THE “NAMDEUTSCH” PROJECT: INVESTIGATING THE DYNAMICS OF GERMAN IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT**

While there are a number of studies on lexical borrowings in Namdeutsch, there have been only a few descriptions of grammatical phenomena so far, and none, to our knowledge, that provides a systematic analysis of non-canonical developments and their contact-linguistic dynamics. One reason is presumably the lack of available spoken language corpora (in particular for informal Namibian German), which are a necessary prerequisite for systematic analyses, including quantitative and qualitative comparisons with informal German in other, mono- and multilingual contexts.

Such an investigation is currently underway within a project conducted jointly at the University of Potsdam (principal investigator: H. Wiese) and at the Freie Universität Berlin (principal investigator: H. Simon), in cooperation with the University of Namibia, Windhoek (M. Zappen-Thomson) funded by the German Research Foundation, *DFG* (see <http://www.uni-potsdam.de/dspdg/projekte/namdeutsch.html>, <http://www.geisteswissenschaften.fu-berlin.de/namdeutsch/>). Under the general designation ‘Namdeutsch’ the project targets all forms of German language use within the German-Namibian community that are not identical to that in Germany. This pre-theoretical, broad usage of the term takes into account that the organisation of varieties we might find for Namibian German has not yet been described systematically, and is still in need of empirical investigation. An open question is, for instance, the status of ‘Nam Släng’: so far, it is not clear whether this is a phenomenon restricted to youth language, whether it constitutes a specific variety that can be distinguished from other informal

language use (cf. Kellermeier-Rehbein 2015, 2016), what effects its medial construction has (e.g., on *Youtube*, or in squibs in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the German-language Namibian daily newspaper), and in how far the medially (re-)produced “Nam Släng” that has been the basis of previous linguistic analyses is representative of actual language use in peer-group interaction. The goal of analyses of Namdeutsch in the project is two-fold, covering structural as well as sociolinguistic aspects of developments in this particularly dynamic, (socio-)linguistically diverse postcolonial setting of German and its multilingual speech community.

On the empirical side, the project will build a corpus of spoken language, covering free conversations, elicited language data from different registers, and sociolinguistic interviews. Once completed, the corpus will be freely available; thus we hope to provide a substantial new empirical resource for research on postcolonial varieties of German and language variation in the context of multilingualism in general.

Such a documentation is particularly important at present, given recent changes that brought about a massively increased influence of European German and might, in the long run, lead to a substantial decline of Namibia-specific characteristics of the German spoken here. One reason for this is the introduction of satellite TV in Namibia. As a result, it is common today for German-speaking families to watch programmes from Germany on a daily basis, while 25 years ago, Pütz (1991) stated that there was only one German movie per week available on Namibian TV. A second factor is an increased mobility from and to Germany, with speakers often spending one or two months a year in Germany, increased tourism from Germany, and also new immigrants from Germany, coming to Namibia for work and/or marrying into the German-speaking community or retiring there.

The corpus will document language use as well as metalinguistic, attitudinal data from the same speech community. From the point of view of linguistic structure, corpus analyses in the Namdeutsch Project will target characteristics of Namdeutsch with a perspective on transfer from contact languages as well as the elaboration of internal tendencies in a dynamic multilingual situation. Sociolinguistic analyses will target aspects of language use and language attitudes; interesting questions will be the interaction of standard language ideologies with perceptions of German in Germany vs. in Namibia; linguistic norm orientation and attitudes towards

youth-linguistic practices in Namibian German; constructions of language prestige and local identity, and the situational choice of linguistic resources within the speech community and in interactions with the larger society. Since there is no systematic corpus of Namdeutsch available yet, an important goal of the Namdeutsch Project will be to document not only standard language that might be close to that in Germany, but also informal spoken registers, which are notoriously difficult to elicit. To meet this challenge, we use a mixed methodology for data collection, bringing together techniques from sociolinguistics, dialectological studies, and investigations into linguistic registers:

1. *Conversation groups* of young speakers in informal peer-group settings. For these conversations, groups of 4 to 6 friends are recorded as they talk about a range of topics. One of the speakers is chosen beforehand to act as an “assistant”, who keeps the conversation flowing and uses impulses where necessary. For such impulses, classical topics of sociolinguistic interviews (children’s games, life-threatening situations) are adapted to the Namibian context. The goal of this set-up is to elicit informal peer-group speech data.
2. *‘Language situation’ elicitations*, where speakers have to describe a fictional incident for different communication partners in formal and informal situations. This set-up elicits a broader linguistic repertoire and allows us to investigate differences between formal and informal usages of German in Namibia. The set-up was initially developed for data elicitations in *Kiezdeutsch* contexts in multilingual neighbourhoods of Berlin (cf. Wiese 2013a), and has been adapted for Namibia. The Berlin studies have already shown that the set-up is powerful enough to elicit informal speech data that are similar to spontaneous data from peer-group conversations (in the Berlin case, the set-up yielded data comparable to *Kiezdeutsch* data from self-recordings of young people in every-day conversations with their friends, cf. Wiese & Pohle 2016).
3. *‘Wenker sentences’ translations*, where speakers are asked to translate a set of given sentences into their dialect. This set-up uses a classical tool from dialectology, employing the original 40 sentences first used by Georg Wenker in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the first large-scale comparative

study of language variation<sup>7</sup>, which makes our results comparable to recent as well as older studies on German dialects. Through translations into vernacular, dialectal forms, the set-up provides data on a broad range of lexical and grammatical phenomena. While Wenker elicitation does not yield authentic language data comparable to speech corpora, they provide an important further type of evidence: if similar structural deviations from the original show up frequently and across speakers, then this will indicate that speakers consider the deviating structure as typical for their language use.<sup>8</sup> In order to reach as many speakers as possible, elicitation is done through a website. In addition to translations of the 40 sentences, speakers are asked to fill in a questionnaire on biographical, social, and sociolinguistic data.

4. *Group interviews* on metalinguistic topics, dealing with language use, language competences, language acquisition, and language attitudes. Interviews are conducted with groups of speakers in urban and rural contexts. In this set-up, the interviewer is present, guiding the conversation through such impulse questions as: What languages do you speak? With whom/when? How have you learned them? Do you mix languages? What is the difference between Nam Släng and Südwestdeutsch? What do you consider ‘good German’?

In a first step, these methods have been applied in a pilot study targeting Namdeutsch and its dynamics at sociolinguistic and grammatical levels. The following section illustrates some first results from this.

#### **4 FIRST RESULTS: NAMDEUTSCH AND ITS (SOCIO-)LINGUISTIC DYNAMICS**

The pilot study gathered data using the four set-ups described above. Conversation groups (set-up 1), ‘language situation’ elicitation (set-up 2),

---

<sup>7</sup> The list of 40 sentences is available online: <<http://staff-www.uni-marburg.de/~naeser/wenker.htm>>.

<sup>8</sup> Fleischer/Hinterhölzl/Solf (2008) provide a detailed discussion and application of this differential method for studies on historical syntax; Fleischer (2015) presents comparable studies on dialect syntax using the original Wenker data.

and group interviews (set-up 4) were conducted with young speakers, aged 13 to 18 (mean age: 16 years), who were pupils at two German schools in Windhoek, Delta-School and DHPS. Altogether, we collected data from 27 young speakers (15 from Delta-School and 12 from DHPS). ‘Wenker sentence’ translations (set-up 3) were elicited online, providing input from a broad range of German-background speakers from different regions of Namibia, aged 12 to 78 (mean age: 45 years). This yielded four types of data, from the four set-ups:

- Conversation group data from 23 speakers (18 female, 5 male) in 7 group conversations of 4 to 5 speakers each, with a duration of altogether 1:38h. In addition to these data from young adolescent speakers, we also obtained, through a cooperation with the German-language *Hitradio Namibia*, three recordings of adult German-Namibian speakers from radio interviews, with a duration of 0:10h altogether.
- ‘Language situation’ elicitations from 26 speakers (19 female, 7 male), with a duration of altogether 0:28h. In this set-up, speakers were asked to imagine that they had just witnessed a car accident in a shopping mall parking lot, and were asked to act out, in the form of role-play, different situations in which they described the accident (a) in a phone call to a friend (*informal speech situation*), and (b) in a conversation with their teacher (*formal speech situation*).
- ‘Wenker sentence’ translations by 216 online participants. This high turnout was achieved by extensive media engagement and cooperation with key actors in community domains of culture, education, and religion, supporting dissemination via radio, newspaper, church letters, and schools. As a result, with over 200 responses, these data capture approx. 1% of the German-background speech community. The willingness to participate in such a study that becomes evident here is also an indication of the fact that speakers are aware of a non-standard variety which is consciously accessible in addition to Standard German.
- Group interviews with 26 speakers (19 female, 7 male) in 7 interviews with 3 to 5 speakers each, and a duration of altogether 1:10h. In addition to this more controlled elicitation with adolescent speakers, further attitudinal data were collected for older, adult speakers as part of ethnographic investigations in such traditional German informal

conversational settings as *Kaffee-Klatsch* (chat over coffee and cake) at home, or *Skat* (traditional card game) gatherings in a pub.

#### 4.1 First findings on language use and language attitudes

For the domains of language use and language attitudes, first results from group interviews and ethnographic data already point to a number of interesting patterns. For one, Namdeutsch seems to play an important role for constructing a German-Namibian identity for a closely connected speech community, both within Namibia and in delimitation from the Germany-German society. Accordingly, a lot of young speakers reported that their language use differed significantly from Germany-German, not only in peer-group interactions with other adolescents, but also in informal conversations with their parents, in particular with mothers. This points to a cross-generational usage of Namibia-specific patterns of German that is in contrast to earlier findings which located such patterns primarily in youth language (*Nam Släng*), while older speakers were assumed to use a standard variety close to European German.

A second finding concerns other languages used in the context of Namdeutsch. For Afrikaans vs. English as lingua francas, we found differences for older vs. younger speakers in usage and attitudes. The older generation is more familiar with Afrikaans, but conceptualises it as a grammatically reduced way of speaking that is accordingly easy to learn, e.g., one speaker mentioned ‘Don’t worry if you do not know Afrikaans yet, you can learn it in one afternoon, it is not really a proper language.’ The younger generation uses English more often, regarding it as a marker of a new and more inter-ethnically and interracially open generation of German Namibians.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to this, for both older and younger speakers alike, autochthonous Namibian languages, most importantly Herero and Oshiwambo, seem to play only a minor role in terms of language use and language prestige. In the pilot study, young people in group discussions attributed competences in such languages biographically only to those speakers in a German-speaking family who grew up on farms as the oldest

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also Kellermeier-Rehbein (2015) for an analysis of this self-perception of the young generation, based on data from the German-Namibian singer EES.

child and thus did not have other German-speaking children as communication partners in their first years of life. It was only this lack of other options that was regarded as a motivation to play with children of, e.g., Herero-speaking employees who lived on the farm, and thus acquire some competences in non-European, ‘Black’ languages. – These findings offer an interesting point of comparison to the situation for Unserdeutsch, the German-based creole that developed in Melanesia:<sup>10</sup> Both speech communities (in the Pacific and in Africa) use German as an important identity-defining element and take a certain pride in their particular variety. However, whereas Unserdeutsch must be considered as moribund today, due to the dispersal of its community (very few speakers remain, all of them in their 60s or older, and they are scattered throughout northeastern and eastern Australia, with even fewer speakers still living in Papua New Guinea), German in Namibia is vital and is still acquired as a first language by young members of the community. Given the high prestige of the language and the high socio-economic status of its speakers, in addition to institutional support from Germany, there is no (strong) tendency towards language shift in Namibia.

#### 4.2 First findings on linguistic structure

For an analysis of grammatical and lexical patterns, we used data from the conversation groups and ‘language situations’ elicitation as well as the group interviews, and results from an initial survey of the ‘Wenker sentence’ translations. In what follows, we give some illustrations of the kind of findings on the linguistic structure of Namdeutsch that this affords, and their implications for our view of non-canonical patterns in language contact (for a more detailed analysis cf. Wiese et al. 2014).

A particular challenge for this kind of investigation is the identification of Namibia-specific characteristics of informal language that are distinct from comparable vernacular language use in German in general, including that in adolescent peer groups. In order to meet this challenge, we found it particularly valuable to compare the Namibian data with corpus data from “KiDKo” (“**K**iez**D**eutsch-**K**orpus”). KiDKo is a corpus of spontaneous,

---

<sup>10</sup> For details cf. Maitz (2016).



informal German conversations among adolescents in Berlin, based on self-recordings in peer-group situations. The main corpus part provides ‘Kiezdeutsch’ data from a multilingual neighbourhood, with a lot of speakers who have competences not only in German as the majority language, but also in different heritage languages (most notably Turkish, Arabic, and Kurdish), in addition to monolingual German speakers (see section 1). A smaller corpus part provides comparative data from a more monolingual German neighbourhood of Berlin. The data consists of audio recordings with transcriptions and multi-layer annotations; the corpus is openly accessible online and automatically searchable at different levels ([www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de](http://www.kiezdeutschkorpus.de)).

An additional advantage of comparisons with such data is that it can also help us assess the explanatory power of contact-linguistic transfers for deviations from standard German that we might find in the Namibian data: if a particular phenomenon can also be observed in Kiezdeutsch, then the language contact with Afrikaans and English, and the resulting interferences cannot be the only basis for its appearance in Namdeutsch. Rather, such similar developments might then point to an elaboration of general internal tendencies in German that gain a particular dynamics in settings of intense language contact.

An indication for such a pattern comes from a non-canonical usage of *gibs*, a merged form of *gibt es* ‘there is’ (lit. ‘gives it’), as a monomorphemic existential marker. So far, such a usage has only been described for Kiezdeutsch (Wiese 2012). Interestingly, we also found evidence for this in Namdeutsch now. The following examples illustrate this with data from young adolescent speakers, from the KiezDeutsch corpus KiDKo (5), and from the Namdeutsch corpus (6, 7)<sup>11</sup>:

(5) *GUCK ma, was hier alles NOCH gibS*  
 look MP what here everything else gibS  
 ‘Look what else there is here!’ [KiDKo, MuP1MK]

(6) *ich WUSSte nich, dass sowas GIBS hier in namibia*  
 I knew not that such.things gibS here in Namibia  
 ‘I didn’t know that things like that exist here in Namibia.’

---

<sup>11</sup> In the transcriptions of audio data, capitalisation indicates main stress.

- (7) *da gibts auch n berühmter SÄNger hier in namibia*  
 there gibts also a famous singer here in Namibia  
 ,There is also a famous singer here in Namibia.‘

This points to a non-canonical use of *gibts* as a monomorphemic existential marker, with the Theme possibly realised as a grammatical subject (e.g., the unambiguously nominative NP “berühmter Sänger” in 7), which is found in different language-contact situations of German: the data point to a usage across speech communities and countries, and independently of its status as a majority language (in Germany, as in the Kiezdeutsch case) or heritage language (in Namibia, as in the Namdeutsch case). Hence, this kind of comparison suggests that what we find here in Namdeutsch might put a spotlight on a development triggered by internal dynamics of German rather than pattern transfer from a specific contact language.

In another domain, we found an expansion of a development that has been described for informal spoken German in general, independently of language contact, namely the use of *so* as a focus marker (Wiese 2009). In our recordings of young people in Windhoek, we found evidence for a similar usage of *like*, a loan from English. This element has also been described as a focus marker, e.g., for informal US-American English (cf., e.g., Underhill 1988). In the Windhoek data, *like* is borrowed into German, and interestingly, sometimes it is combined with focus-marking German *so*. (8) gives an example for focus marking *like* in American English, (9) an example for focus marking *so* in data from Germany, from the monolingual part of KiDKo; (10) and (11) provide similar patterns from Namdeutsch:

- (8) *It’s not, like, a depressing film. It’s a documentary.* [Underhill 1988: 239]

- (9) *dis KRIEG ich – hab ich so KOSTenlos bekomm*  
 that get I have I so for.free received  
 ‘I get this – received this, like, free of charge. [KiDKo, Mo01MD]

- (10) *ich war für DREI wochen in DEUTSCHland,*  
 I was for three weeks in Germany  
*da to warn wir like in GÖTTingen, MÜNchen, HAMBurg*  
 there then were we like in Göttingen, Munich, Hamburg  
 ‘I was in Germany for three weeks, and then, we were, like, in  
 Göttingen, Munich, Hamburg.’
- (11) *das is da, wo diese ACHterbahnen und sowas sind,*  
 that is there where these rollercoasters and such things are  
*like so masSives DING nur mit so verGNÜgungssachen.*  
*like so massive thing only with so amusement.stuff.*  
 ‘That is where these rollercoasters and things like that are, like, a  
 massive fair with only, like, amusement stuff.’

This suggests a pattern where Namdeutsch picks up on existing developments of German and further expands them through contact-linguistic transfer. Further evidence for such dynamics in yet another grammatical domain comes from the ‘Wenker sentence’ data. In European German, *ein bisschen* ‘a little bit’ can lose its article and be reduced to *bisschen* in informal language, highlighting an ongoing development from a full noun phrase to an adverb. We found such usages of *bisschen* also in a number of ‘Wenker sentence’ translations in Namdeutsch, cf. (12) below. In addition, though, there was also evidence for a similar pattern for semantically comparable borrowings from Afrikaans, namely *bietje* and its informal orthographic variant *bikkie*, cf. (13) and (14). Such data point to an interesting interaction of language-internal tendencies and contact-linguistic borrowing, which we plan to further investigate within the Namdeutsch Project.

Wenker sentence 31 [original]:

*Ich verstehe euch nicht, ihr müßt ein bißchen lauter*  
 I understand you.PL not, you.PL must a little.bit louder  
*sprechen.*  
 speak

‘I do not understand you, you must speak a little bit louder.’

- (12) *Ich versteh euch nicht, red bisschen lauter.*  
 I understand you.PL not talk little.bit louder
- (13) *Ich hör nicht, redet bietjie lauter.*  
 I hear not talk *bietjie* louder
- (14) *Ich verstehe euch nicht, ihr muesst bikkie lauter*  
 I understand you.PL not you.PL must *bikkie* louder  
*reden.*  
 talk.

Another interesting domain is direct transfer from the contact languages English and Afrikaans, given their great structural and typological proximity to each other as well as to German. This particularly favours direct transfer, and it also allows a deeper syntactic integration of lexical borrowings. A case in point is provided by first findings on *net*: this element seems to be borrowed as a modal particle from Afrikaans into German, cf. the example in (15), where it replaces German *nur* ‘only’ used here as a modal particle in a ‘Wenker sentence’ (two further lexical integrations in the translation data are *brak* ‘dog’ from Afrikaans *brak/brakhond* ‘hound’, and *fockol*, from English *fuck-all*):

Wenker sentence 39 [original]:

*Geh nur, der braune Hund tut dir nichts.*  
 go MP the brown dog does you.DAT nothing  
 ‘Just go, the brown dog will not do you any harm.’

- (15) *Geh net der braune brak tut dia fockol!*  
 go *net* the brown brak does you nothing

This is particularly interesting evidence, given the domain of borrowing: while the class of modal particles plays an important role in German, to our knowledge, there is, so far, no evidence for borrowing such a particle into European German. The multilingual context of Namdeutsch might be more open for such transfer, and further investigation into other varieties of German, including Kiezdeutsch, should shed a light on the question whether

this is restricted to particular language-contact configurations, be it with closely related contact languages (Afrikaans, English) or for German as a heritage language (Namdeutsch and other (post-)colonial varieties), or whether this is a general phenomenon of German in a contact setting (including, e.g., Kiezdeutsch in Germany).

Some inflectional data from our corpus also provide evidence for non-canonical case marking, which might point to a reduction of case distinctions similar to that reported for other language islands (cf. Rosenberg 2003, 2005). (16) gives an example for non-canonical *die*, a 3SG.FEM pronoun/demonstrative that is in a complement position where the Standard German form would be *der* (realising 3SG.FEM.DAT), whereas here it appears in its nominative/accusative form.

- (16) *und dann renn ich hinter die her*  
 and then run I behind she PART  
 ‘And then I am running behind her.’

As a recent study of different heritage varieties of German conducted by Yager et al. (2015) shows, we do not find mere reduction in such non-canonical case marking, but also new morphosyntactic developments that point to patterns of differential object marking in the sense of Bossong (1985). In order to test such hypotheses for Namdeutsch more thoroughly, the Namdeutsch Project will assemble a broader data base that will also allow us to investigate the presence or absence of further phenomena attested for language islands (e.g., the expansion of *tun* ‘to do’ as an auxiliary, further developments in the system of verbal categories, phonetic-phonological reductions, etc.; cf., for instance, Salmons 2003, Brown & Putnam 2015, Pierce, Boas & Roesch 2015).

The findings illustrated here come from only a small corpus of pilot data and involve, for the time being, only a few selected domains of language attitudes and language structure. However, as we hope to have shown in this overview, even so they already indicate a range of interesting domains for investigations, touching on contact-linguistic borrowings and integrations, elaboration of internal tendencies of language change and language variation, language perception, ideology, and identity construction in the multilingual context of heritage German in Namibia. Further research in the Namdeutsch

Project aims to provide in-depth studies on such domains, based on a broader basis of informal and formal speech and attitudinal data, which will be made available to the larger research community as an open-access “Namdeutsch” corpus.

As this discussion has shown, there is a wealth of interesting phenomena waiting to be explored for German in Namibia, and the same is true for such varieties as Unserdeutsch in Melanesia: the study of German in Namibia and in Melanesia are in similar positions at the moment, despite massive differences in their history and their current sociolinguistic status. Even though there has been some research on the respective varieties – somewhat more in the Namibian case, but not very extensive – they are still deplorably understudied. Crucially, for both languages we lack substantial corpora, hence it is not surprising that our knowledge of their grammatical characteristics is still rather limited. All the more important are ongoing projects that aim to compile data and analyse them in a coherent fashion.

### ABBREVIATIONS

DAT	dative	PART	particle
FEM	feminine	PL	plural
MP	modal particle	SG	singular
NP	Noun Phrase		

### REFERENCES

- Ammon, Ulrich. 2015. *Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in der Welt*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Behrend, Nina & Elisabeth Knipf-Komlosi (eds.). 2006. *Sprachinselwelten – The World of Language Islands*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
- Boas, Hans C. 2003. Tracing dialect death: The Texas German Dialect Project. In Julie Larson & Mary Paster (eds.), *Proceedings of the 28th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 387–398. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- Boas, Hans C. 2009. *The Life and Death of Texas German*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Böhm, Michael. 2003. *Die Stellung der deutschen Sprache in Afrika vor dem Hintergrund der bildungs- und sprachpolitischen Gegebenheiten sowie der deutschen Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik*. Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang.
- Bossong, Georg. 1985. *Empirische Universalienforschung. Differentielle Objektmarkierung in den Neuiranischen Sprachen*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Brown, Joshua R. & Michael Putnam. 2015. Functional convergence and extension in contact: Syntactic and semantic attributes of the progressive aspect in Pennsylvania Dutch. In Janne Bondi Johannessen & Joseph C. Salmons (eds.), *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America. Acquisition, Attrition and Change*, 135–160. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Deumert, Ana. 2009. Namibian Kiche Duits: The making (and decline) of a neo-African language. *Journal of Germanic Linguistics* 21. 349–417.
- Eichinger, Ludwig, Albrecht Plewnia & Claudia Maria Riehl (eds.). 2008. *Handbuch der deutschen Sprachminderheiten in Mittel- und Osteuropa*. Tübingen: Narr.
- Fleischer, Jürg. 2015. Pro-Drop und Pronominalenklise in den Dialekten des Deutschen. Eine Auswertung von Wenkersatz 12. In Michael Elmentaler, Markus Hundt & Jürgen Erich Schmidt (eds.), *Deutsche Dialekte. Konzepte, Probleme, Handlungsfelder. Akten des 4. Kongresses der Internationalen Gesellschaft für Dialektologie des Deutschen (IGDD)*, 191–210. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Fleischer, Jürg, Roland Hinterhölzl & Michael Solf. 2008. Zum Quellenwert des althochdeutschen Tatian für die Syntaxforschung: Überlegungen auf der Basis von Wortstellungsphänomenen. *Zeitschrift für Germanistische Linguistik* 36. 210–239.
- Gretschel, Hans-Volker. 1995. The status and use of the German language in independent Namibia: Can German survive the transition? In Martin Pütz (ed.), *Discrimination through Language in Africa? Perspectives on the Namibian Experience*, 299–314. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.
- Gogolin, Ingrid. 1994. *Der monolinguale Habitus der multilingualen Schule*. Münster & New York: Waxmann.
- Johannessen, Janne Bondi & Joseph C. Salmons (eds.). 2015a. *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Acquisition, Attrition and Change*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Johannessen, Janne Bondi & Joseph C. Salmons. 2015b. The study of Germanic heritage languages in the Americas. In Janne Bondi Johannessen & Joseph C. Salmons (eds.), *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Acquisition, Attrition and Change*, 1–17. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Keel, William & Klaus Mattheier (eds.). 2003. *German Language Varieties Worldwide: Internal and External Perspectives*. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
- Kellermeier-Rehbein, Birte. 2015. Namslang – Deutsche Jugendsprache in Namibia? In Corinna Peschel & Kerstin Runschke (eds.), *Sprachvariation und Sprachreflexion in interkulturellen Kontexten*, 41–62. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
- Kellermeier-Rehbein, Birte. 2016. Sprache in postkolonialen Kontexten. Varietäten der deutschen Sprache in Namibia. In Thomas Stolz, Ingo H. Warnke & Daniel Schmidt-Brücken (eds.), *Sprache und Kolonialismus. Eine interdisziplinäre Einführung zu Sprache und Kommunikation in kolonialen Kontexten*, 213–234. Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter.
- Klein, Norbert. 1984. *Deutsche Sprache im Kontakt in Südwestafrika*. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- Maitz, Péter. 2016. Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German). Eine vergessene koloniale Varietät des Deutschen im melanesischen Pazifik. In Alexandra N. Lenz (ed.), *German Abroad. Perspektiven der Variationslinguistik, Sprachkontakt- und Mehrsprachigkeitsforschung*, 211–240. Göttingen: V&R unipress.
- Nöckler, Herbert C. 1963. *Sprachmischung in Südwestafrika*. München: Hueber.
- Pierce, Marc, Hans C. Boas & Karen Roesch. 2015. The history of front rounded vowels in New Braunsfels German. In Janne Bondi Johannessen & Joseph C. Salmons (eds.), *Germanic Heritage Languages in North America: Acquisition, Attrition and Change*, 116–131. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Poplack, Shana & Stephen Levey. 2010. Contact-induced grammatical change: A cautionary tale. In Peter Auer & Jürgen Erich Schmidt (eds.), *Language and Space: An International Handbook of Linguistic Variation*. 391–419. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.
- Pütz, Martin. 1991. ‘Südwesterdeutsch’ in Namibia: Sprachpolitik, Sprachplanung und Spracherhalt. *Linguistische Berichte* 136. 455–476.



- Rosenberg, Peter. 2003. Comparative speech island research: Some results from studies in Russia and Brazil. In William Keel & Klaus Mattheier (eds.), *German Language Varieties Worldwide: Internal and External Perspectives*. 199–238. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
- Rosenberg, Peter. 2005. Dialect convergence in the German language islands (Sprachinseln). In Peter Auer, Frans Hinskens & Paul Kerswill (eds.), *Dialect Change: Convergence and Divergence in European Languages*, 221–235. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Salmons, Joseph. 2003. Sprachkontaktdynamik: Konvergenz und Divergenz in amerikanischen Sprachinseln. In Jannis Androutsopoulos & Evelyn Ziegler (eds.), „Standardfragen“. *Soziolinguistische Perspektiven auf Sprachgeschichte, Sprachkontakt und Sprachvariation*, 109–120. Frankfurt a. M.: Lang.
- Sell, Eric E. 2011. *Esisallesoreidt. NAM Släng – Deutsch*. Vol. 2. Windhoek: EES Records.
- Shah, Sheena. 2007. German in a contact situation: The case of Namibian German. *eDUSA* 2. 20–45.
- Underhill, Robert. 1988. Like is, like, focus. *American Speech* 63. 234–246.
- Voeste, Anja. 2005. „Den Neger heben“? Die Sprachenfrage in Deutsch-Neuguinea (1884-1914). In Elisabeth Berner, Manuela Böhm & Anja Voeste (eds.), *Ein groß vnnd narhafft haffen. Festschrift für Joachim Gessinger*, 145–156. Potsdam: Universitätsverlag.
- Warnke, Ingo H. (ed.). 2009. *Deutsche Sprache und Kolonialismus. Aspekte der nationalen Kommunikation 1884–1919*. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.
- Weigend, Guido G. 1985. German settlement patterns in Namibia. *Geographical Review* 55. 156–169.
- Wiese, Heike. 2009. Grammatical innovation in multiethnic urban Europe: New linguistic practices among adolescents. *Lingua* 119. 782–806.
- Wiese, Heike. 2012. *Kiezdeutsch. Ein neuer Dialekt entsteht*. München: Beck.
- Wiese, Heike. 2013a. Das Potential multiethnischer Sprecher-gemeinschaften. In Arnulf Deppermann (ed.), *Das Deutsch der Migranten*, 41–58. Berlin & Boston: de Gruyter.

- Wiese, Heike. 2013b. What can new urban dialects tell us about internal language dynamics? The power of language diversity. *Linguistische Berichte* Special Issue 19. 208–245.
- Wiese, Heike. 2015. “This migrants’ babble is not a German dialect!”: The interaction of standard language ideology and ‘us’/‘them’-dichotomies in the public discourse on a multiethnolect. *Language in Society* 44. 341–368.
- Wiese, Heike (to appear). Urban contact dialects. To appear in Salikoko Mufwene & Anna María Escobar (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Language Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wiese, Heike & Maria Pohle. 2016. „Ich geh Kino“ oder „... ins Kino“? Gebrauchsrestriktionen nichtkanonischer Lokalangaben. *Zeitschrift für Sprachwissenschaft* 35. 171–216.
- Wiese, Heike, Horst J. Simon, Marianne Zappen-Thomson & Kathleen Schumann. 2014. Mehrsprachiges Deutsch: Beobachtungen zu Namdeutsch und Kiezdeutsch. *Zeitschrift für Dialektologie und Linguistik* 81. 247–307.
- Yager, Lisa, Nora Hellmold, Hyoun-A Joo, Michael T. Putnam, Eleonora Rossi, Catherin Stafford & Joseph Salmons. 2015. New structural patterns in moribund grammar: Case marking in heritage German. *Frontiers in Psychology* 6, 1716.
- Zifonun, Gisela. 2003. Dem Vater sein Hut. Der Charme des Substandards und wie wir ihm gerecht werden können. *Deutsche Sprache* 31. 97–126.