

EXAMINING THE NAMDEUTSCH AND ITS STRUCTURAL VARIATION TO STANDARD GERMAN

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Abstract

This study examines the historical development and structural evolution of Namdeutsch (Namibian German) within Namibia's multilingual society. Drawing on the works of Wiese, Zimmer, and Shenna Shaah, it analyses syntactic and morphological variations that distinguish Namdeutsch from Standard German. The research examines how social, linguistic, and historical contacts—particularly with English, Afrikaans, and indigenous languages—have influenced the development of this German variety. Key findings include the adaptation of verbal structures, the use of prepositions, and the influence of colonial and postcolonial language policies. The paper argues that Namdeutsch reflects a dynamic case of contact-induced language change and variation. With our empirical findings, we aim to answer the key question of whether Namdeutsch is a koine or a pidgin. This article argues that Namdeutsch is koine.

Keywords: Hereros and Namas; Language Island; language vitality; Namdeutsch.

Introduction

Namdeutsch, also known as Namibian German, stands out as one of the variants of the German language. It represents a compact and relatively smaller group within the spectrum of German language varieties. Over an extended period, this language has experienced significant evolution and is presently confronted with a potential risk of attrition, although such a decline has yet to be conclusively established. The present study seeks to investigate the historical development of the German language in Namibia and examine the influence exerted by the community's social structure on the formation of the contemporary Namibian German speech community. This paper aims to rigorously investigate the ongoing development and shaping of Namdeutsch within the dynamic multilingual linguistic landscape of Namibia. Furthermore, the study conducts a detailed analysis of the syntactic and verbal structures of Namdeutsch, with particular attention to its employment of grammatical gender, juxtaposed against standard German. Additionally, this research critically evaluates the classification of Namdeutsch within the wider spectrum of German language varieties. Through this comprehensive inquiry, the study seeks to contribute significant insights into the distinctive linguistic evolution of Namdeutsch, elucidating the impact of historical, cultural, and social factors inherent in Namibian society.

1. The Emergence of the Germans in Namibia

The arrival of the Germans in central Namibia is intricately connected to the Herero and Nama tribes. Germany's expansion of colonies following the Berlin Conference marked a significant shift in Namibian society and its social structure. Among the diverse languages and tribes in Namibia at the time, only the Herero and Nama had direct and consistent contact with the Europeans, primarily the Germans. According to Baker, prior to the arrival of the Europeans, Namibian tribes operated under a decentralized government structure (6). While the total number of tribes in the region remains unverified, it is widely acknowledged that numerous tribes existed, each with their distinct political structure, often distinct from traditional European models.

The cultures, lifestyles, and economic frameworks of these tribes were unique, posing a challenge to Germany's objective of establishing a centralized structure in Namibia. This divergence made it difficult to implement a unified government among the tribes. The Germans encountered resistance, particularly from the Herero people. The lack of consensus on political matters led to a significant conflict, prompting the Germans to resort to violence and forcibly impose their government on the Hereros. This involved the seizure of lands, causing the locals to lose a substantial portion of their cattle and compelling them into paid labor for the Germans.

The conflict escalated, and the Germans responded with a systematic genocide against the Herero and Nama people. Entire ethnic groups were confined

to concentration camps, where a high rate of genocide occurred, with many inmates subjected to lethal forced labor (Olusoga 124). Most of those spared were women, as young men were compelled to work, and women had only daily contact with the German language. The estimated death toll from the genocide was approximately 100,000, with men constituting the highest percentage of victims. Consequently, the Herero and Nama became minority tribes in Namibia due to the devastating impact of the genocide. (Olusoga 117).

2. Attrition of the standard German among the social classes in Pre-colonial

The German language was established as the national language following the migration of Germans to the new territory, where they predominantly encountered black individuals speaking this language. However, Baker highlights that affluent white German emigrants in Namibia deliberately segregated themselves from impoverished black Namibian speakers of German who were exposed to diverse linguistic varieties within the community (12). Furthermore, Baker notes the establishment of the German school system, *Südwester*, which symbolized and reinforced segregation between Namibians and Germans (13). This institution emerged as the premier educational establishment in the country, employing exclusively German as the medium of instruction. Consequently, the German language became confined primarily to an upper-class minority. To attain social parity with this elite class, it became imperative for black Namibians in the vicinity to acquire proficiency in German through mandatory schooling. This policy underscored the perceived superiority of the German language and cultural dynamic that remains conspicuously evident within contemporary Namibian society. Additionally, it is significant to note that exogamy was prohibited during both pre-colonial and early post-colonial periods in Namibia, thereby restricting the linguistic vitality and expansion through intermarriage. Individuals engaging in mixed unions or practicing exogamy faced lethal repercussions; thus, marriage was strictly confined within clan boundaries. Social interaction was significantly constrained due to linguistic and cultural discrimination within society, resulting in the limited dissemination of the German language.

3. Language maintenance among the minority in post-colonial Namibia

Zimmer notes that German became a minority language in Namibia due to the country's colonial history, when South Africa took over the administration of the territory after Germany's defeat in World War I (8). During the colonial period, German was the official language of the administration and was also widely spoken by the German settlers who lived in the colony. After Namibia gained independence from South Africa in 1990, English was adopted as the country's official language, and it became the language of government and education. However, German has remained a minority language in Namibia due to the

absence of robust German-speaking communities, as well as the historical and cultural ties between Namibia and Germany.

This change in communal language settings can also be traced to the fact that only Hereros and Namas had direct contact with the Germans at the expense of colonization (Olusoga 45). These tribes have been exposed to the propensity of great genocide, which invigorated the reduction of the tribes/speech community to a minority group in the region. This great ethnic cleansing affected mostly men, reducing the propagation of the Hereros and Namas by a high percentage. Also, the colonial rule over the colony was only for a very short time, and the cruel attitude of the Germans to the tribes might be a determinant for the redundancy and the minimal widespread of the language. Additionally, the Hereros and the Namas had contact with the Germans in central Namibia; they can be found today in Windhoek, the capital city of the country. This can never be described as a language island, and this doesn't show any probability that the language can be preserved, given the level of exposure of the city to varieties of people and language contact. However, after second world war II, in which the Germans were defeated, a lot of Germans who were of course dominating and domiciling in the part of the southern and central part of the country at full strength were deployed back to Germany, making the environment lose the few native speakers, we should note that not all the Germans left the territory, we still have few that remained in the country and these are ranked among the elites and top social class in the society. The low contact with native speakers can also be attributed to the abatement of the vitality of the German language in today's Namibia.

Examining this from another perspective, Mesthrie states that a whole group may, over time, exchange one language for another, seldom willingly, most often by force of circumstances (54). Such circumstances include the migration of a group of people who become a minority in a new territory in which another language is dominant. This is the case of Namdeutsch, but it has never experienced a migration in this respect, but a proliferation of language contact from already suppressed tribes or regions affected by a high mass of genocide. As Mesthrie's submission is so plausible to our discussion, it should be noted that the German language went through a language shift at the independence of Namibia, and the remnant of the German language resorted to language change. Either language shift or language change is based on empirical findings.

Today, German is still spoken by some Namibians as a first language, particularly in the capital city of Windhoek and in the coastal town of Swakopmund. German is also taught in some Namibian schools as a second language. Questions have arrived from the perspective of language maintenance. As we have discussed earlier that the language is a language of the non-predominant, but there are still excesses to consider. We will understand that Namdeutsch is completely another dialect of the German language, just as we have varieties also in Germany. Zimmer & Sheena note that this can be a result of the

vitality of the language in a specific domain (221). How is this language maintained? Firstly, we consider the position and domain in which the language is being used. We can deduce that the German language has found itself entwined with varieties of language and cannot be considered part of a language island. Zimmer & Simon note that "the vitality of any German varieties as spoken by minorities is closely linked to the institutional support from which these varieties benefit" (3). As true as it could be, this might be quite different in the case of Namdeutsch. However, Zimmer argues that the situation of Namdeutsch has some correlations with the contemporary language island variety, in the sense that its component is obviously a colonial past, and we can still find the indigenous or ancestry of the Germans, who remained in the domain such as Swakopmund, while upholding the vitality of the language. In this case, the concept of a language island can be bifurcated, that is, it is subject to conflicting to different approaches. So far, a language is enclaved, does it still have to be exposed or influenced by other languages, or is it completely preserved and avoids external influence or contact? This submission about language is a topic that still needs to be revisited by linguistics. In the case of Namdeutsch, its exposure to external influence is evident in the structure, such as co-mixing and co-switching with borrowed words and phrases, which will be discussed in the coming phase. However, the syntactical aspect of the language is still intact with the standard language.

Namdeutsch is regarded today as the national language, replacing its earlier position in the country. Contrary to this, we can always ask ourselves, what affiliation does this language have? Zimmer asks if there are still schools, libraries, religious affiliations, and so on that can still be entwined with the maintenance of the language (11). We realized that, in today's Namibia, we have the Allgemeine Zeitung in Windhoek, which is available daily for people to read. Not only this, but the German language is also used in religious settings and is still being taught as the mother language at both elementary and high schools (Deumert 377). Not only that, but Sheena also finds out that people in Swakopmund, which is a predominantly German-speaking community, still have access to German TV and Radio programs (21). The initial rule to maintain endogamy was at some point avoided, and even in today's Namibia, we have children of mixed origin, who learn the German language at home (Deumert 371).

However, the population of major speakers of the language still takes approximately 2% of the Namibian population, which is not quite enough to save the language from attrition. The Swakopmund community still has contact with different languages such as Assumas, Afrikaans, Herero, and English speakers. Can we still consider Swakopmund as a language island? Maitz & Volker state that Namdeutsch is endangered (77). We would never attach this to language attrition, but we can deduce that this can solely be the fact that very few minorities in the country speak the language, and with the heavy contact the language has had over time, we can believe they are overcoming Namdeutsch, and being exposed

to endangerment is inevitable. We can partially believe total language shift is imminent. However, appropriate measures have been implemented to preserve the language, and their effectiveness should not be underestimated or dismissed

Moreover, all these aforementioned have helped to maintain the language in today's German-predominant communities in Namibia. We can deduce that the language has contributed to the country's economic sector despite the infinitesimal number of speakers, but still, the fact that the German language remains the language of the elites and upper class in Namibia.

4. Formulation of Namdeutsch through contact as a result of a multilingual language island

Zimmer argues that there are some particles in the morphology, phonology, syntax, lexicon, and even orthography that have some similarities with the northern German dialect (9). The main Namdeutsch is said to be a combination of all the languages he has had contact with, as we have discussed above. It has some elements and borrowings from both Afrikaans and English (Kellermeier-Rehbein 46). This variety is generally tagged as slang or pidgin. The diffusion of linguistic change is encouraged by relatively open channels of communication and discouraged by boundaries and weaknesses in the lines of communication (Milroy & Milroy 12). This submission from Milroy corresponds to the situation of Namdeutsch. Since the social class that upholds the standard German language in Namibia has created this boundary, segregating the poor Namibians from forming a tie, it has attenuated the acquisition, diffusion, and development of the standard German among the public in post-colonial Namibia.

In the next phase, we will examine how language contact has influenced the development of Namdeutsch and what factors have contributed to its formation. However, as we have said, Namdeutsch has attributes of Afrikaans and English in its syntax, but for this work, we will only focus on English. The setting for German in Namibia is thus characterized 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, not only through the influence of the higher authorities of the specific community, but also through the influence of the people as agents of change (Wiese, Zimmer, & Schumann 3). The multilingual nature of this society paves way for an intense dynamism in language contact.

According to Deumert's observation, in the early 2000s, apparently, 10 years after the independence of Namibia, we can deduce that the most widely spoken language in Namibia was Oshiwambo, spoken by around 49% of the population, whereas both German and English took 1.1% and 1.9% respectively (354). The change to the use of the English language is still not significant today, in the sense that till today, Oshiwambo is still the most spoken language in Namibia, while English is the language of governance and German is the language of economy and business purposes mostly because the vitality of German language still resides in

Windhoek the economic capital of the country. However, the fact that Oshiwambo remains the commonly spoken language we can deduce that there is still fragmentation in the language institutes, that is, most Namibians still have a deep understanding of Afrikaans, English, and German, and some other local dialects, making this society a deeply multilingual society.

5. Verbal structure

We will base our analysis primarily on the work of Wiese, Zimmer, and Schumann, which explores the reformation and innovation of Namdeutsch within Namibia's multilingual speech community. In addition, we will draw on the research of Sheena Shah. This analysis will engage critically with their findings, particularly concerning the syntactic variations of Namdeutsch in comparison to standard German, highlighting the linguistic adaptations that emerge in a postcolonial and multilingual context. This study adopts an ethnographic approach, relying on extended field observations, speaker interactions, and naturalistic language use data as documented in Sheena Shah's 14-months fieldwork. This approach enables an in-depth understanding of Namdeutsch as used in daily communication among multilingual speakers in Namibia.

Sheena Shah submitted sumptuous findings of Namdeutsch structure during her 14-month sojourn in Namibia for her intensive research on the formation of Namdeutsch. She lived and interacted with the natives, and then she had informants, from whom she gathered her information and findings.

Firstly, Sheena realizes that the verbal structure of Namdeutsch has the same paradigm as that of standard German, to which the basic verbal conjugational rules adhere respectively (30). Through Sheena's analysis, we can deduce that the major English words Namdeutsch had contact with are being deployed in verbal forms. However, the basic structure of verbal conjugation in the standard language was never violated. Sheena deploys some major examples: a few will be addressed to further buttress our points: we have words like *worry*, *like*, and *miscall*. They follow the same pattern of the regular verb in standard German as seen below (24):

miscallen

Ich miscall

Du miscallst

Er/sie misscallt

Wir/Sie/sie miscallen.

worrien

Ich worrie

Du worriest

Er/Sie worriest

Wir/Sie/sie worrien.

In this sense, we have sentences like:

Du miscallst ihn - you miscall him.

sie worrien mich - you are worrying me.

All English verbs, that were borrowed into Namdeutsch through external influence, tend to undergo this structural pattern. However, this can be attributed to co-switching as an influence of language contact. Additionally, we realize that Namdeutsch speakers use the future auxiliary verb *gehen* to replace *werden*, just like we have *will* in English (Radke 131). “Given the parallel developments of *gehen* into a future auxiliary in NG and South African German, it is indeed very likely that the emergence of this new feature may have been reinforced by the influence of fully grammaticalized *gaan* in Afrikaans and *going* in English” (Sheena & Zimmer 250).

This is used to mark future tenses

English: *I am going to sing.*

Namdeutsch: *Ich gehe singen.*

German: *Ich werde singen.*

The example given by Radke provides more clarification on this. (136)

Namdeutsch: *Wie viele geht das Kosten.*

German: *Wie viele wird es kosten.*

We can observe that this structure was only derived from English morphology. However, this can be attributed to internally motivated language change in the sense that it affects the grammatical paradigm. “*Any change which can be traced to structural considerations in a language, and which is independent of sociolinguistic factors, can be classified as internally motivated change*” (Hickey 2).

Radke classifies speakers of Namdeutsch into two categories. The outgroup and the ingroup categories in the mode of communication and usage of the German language generally. The speakers who fall under the outgroup communication tend to be mindful of the utterance and the mode of speaking to be more standard German, while the ingroup category are those who are very comfortable with the usage of Namdeutsch (Radke 128-129). We observe co-switching and co-mixing in both English and Afrikaans in their mode of communication. However, Radke finds out that, as conscious as the outgroup could be, sometimes the speakers fall unconscious of their utterance in the form of Namdeutsch, which has already been

embedded in them. By examining Radke's submission, an outgroup or ingroup communication can be open to anyone, depending on the situation, and particularly with the native speaker of standard German. This shows that the speakers of Namdeutsch are aware of standard German, and they can also speak standard German, except for the ingroup, and they can always switch when the need arises. Deumert notes:

Südwestdeutsch (SWD) is not homogeneous, and the frequency with which speakers use SWD variants correlates with age, social status/ education, level of formality, and interlocutors present. Those who have acquired Standard German in the school environment often show conscious avoidance of highly marked SWD features in more formal contexts, especially extensive borrowing from English and Afrikaans. (359)

This broadens the perspective of the stand and our discussion, in the domain in which the standard language remains. The awareness of the use of standard German in outgroups depends on age, social status, and also some other aforementioned and, mostly the educated who have learned standard German in school.

Sheena also notes that the use of the preposition in Namdeutsch reflects on the conventional use of prepositional in English: *für* and *zu* (29);

Ich fahre nach Lodon (Standard)

*Ich fahre **zu** London* (Namdeutsch)

Ich warte auf dich (standard)

*Ich warte **für** dich* (Namdeutsch)

This is a result of the conventional use of "to" in English, which is the sole preposition to mark location and movement to a specific place. Also, the latter is the use of English *for* as *für* instead of *auf*. According to Sheena, Namdeutsch tends not to follow the rules that govern the German verbs with prepositions. In the case of *suchen*. Namdeutsch produces *suchen für* instead of *suchen nach* > *ich suche für ihn* (Namdeutsch) – *ich suche nach ihm* (German) (Sheena 26).

6. Dative Marker

Bousquette argues that the main identifier of a non-standard German is the absence of the dative case, that is to say, the use of the dative case is redundant (502). Although it is not always similar in the case of objective pronouns in Namdeutsch, in the sense that, as stated by Sheena, *der hat **mir** mal miscall* and some other paradigms are common. In this case, I will then say that Namdeutsch cannot be considered as mere slang and pidgin but just koinesation, as some of the attributes that Kerswill mentions are reflected in Namdeutsch, which makes it

totally different from pidgin as it appears in the case of leveling (192). For the fact that the dative case, which is one of the attributes of standard German, as opposed to Bousquette's view, we can deduce one of the observations of Howells, that the "majority forms in the mix, rather than minority forms, win out" (Goss & Howell 70). We can observe that Namdeutsch has formed from different varieties, such as Afrikaans, English, Oshiwambo, Herero, and German. In this case, the language of the majority, which is German, actually wins out, bringing "leveling" in the dative case (Bousquette 492).

On the other hand, we have the possessive pronoun not showing a dative case even with a dative preposition. This occurs among standard German two-way prepositions such as *auf, in, neben, vor, entlang, wegen, (wegen der Mutter - standard German - wegen die Mutter Namdeutsch)* as they tend to remain in the accusative case in Namdeutsch paradigm. The Namibian Germans, also known as Südwestdeutsch, frequently use the accusative instead of the dative with prepositions that govern the dative.

For example: *ich spiele mit mein Mutter* (Namdeutsch)

ich spiele mit meiner Mutter (Standard German)

ich bin in sein Klasse (Namdeutsch)

ich bin in seiner Klasse (Standard German) (Sheena 10).

The intensity bifurcates the language paradigm, in the sense that Namdeutsch still maintains some standard German paradigm. In most cases, Namdeutsch still maintains the V2 pattern of the standard German; this makes the language unique as it never deviates from the most basic structure of the standard language. About some of the examples given by Sheena Shaah, we can deduce that the V2 pattern is still maintained in Namdeutsch. Additionally, the V-final is never lost, for example: *Ich wunder, warum Benita ihre Haare so gefarbt hat*. This is one of the pieces of evidence we notice in Sheena Shah's research, which shows that the V-final is also being maintained. For the lexical item, Sheena buttresses that most words related to nature, such as flora and Fauna and also culturally related words, have been adopted into Namdeutsch either from the native languages or from English and even Afrikaans (37), Sheena also states that gender for these nouns is chosen from the relatedness with the initial word gender in German. For example: *die Inschuhrenz - die Versicherung, die Miessies - die Frau* (36). Nouns borrowed from English are mostly related to technology, and from Shaah's data, we realized that a lot of new loan words in Namdeutsch tend to use *die* for their genders.

Also, in Namdeutsch, there is a conflict between the demonstrative pronoun and the third-person singular pronoun. In the sense that Namdeutsch speakers use the demonstrative pronoun often rather than the latter. For example: *der ist busy - he is busy*, although it is a thing that speakers are avoiding today in

standard German (Sheena 40). Namdeutsch mostly uses the contraction in *haben*. They mostly say or write *ham* instead of the *haben*. For example: *Wir ham ein Auto*. Finally, we notice that the reflexive verbs are being omitted in their speech. For example: *wir ham getroffen*.

Conclusion

We have examined the history of Namibia and the interactions between some tribes in central and southern Namibia and the Germans. We have learned how the German language has evolved in Namibia to form Namdeutsch. However, we believe with deeper research from renowned scholars and researchers, we can conceptualize the phenomenon at the level and process of language change and shift in Namdeutsch. We have examined the social factors that led to this variation and even the people's attitude toward the language. The variation of Namdeutsch has been compared to the standard German, and we have observed the differences that characterize Namdeutsch as a regional and non-standard variety. Finally, we can conclude whether Namdeutsch belongs to Pidgin and Koinés based on our empirical findings and available comparisons.

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