

Germania in Africa – Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Contact and Colonization

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In this paper I will give an overview of the history of the Germanic languages in Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular Afrikaans in South Africa and German in Namibia (Deumert 2004, 2007, 2009). Contact and colonization, hegemony and appropriation, are socio-historical processes which have shaped and moulded the histories and structures of these extraterritorial varieties.

I will first consider methodological issues, especially the nature and interpretation of the colonial archive – which has made large groups of speakers invisible – and the consequent use of oral history interviewing as an important alternative data source for historical sociolinguistics.

I will then turn to issues of sociolinguistic theory, in particular the recent interest in meaning, creativity and the rise of ethnography. These theoretical debates have consequences for how we study and understand language use, contact and change in historical perspective. While Labovian variation analysis can provide us with important insights on patterns of usage in the speech community, detailed analysis of individual communicative encounters (and the repertoires of individual speakers) – as well as attention to the accompanying cultural ideologies – is necessary if our aim is to understand Silverstein's (1985) 'total linguistic fact'. In this context I will critique Trudgill's (2008) recent call for a speaker-free account of contact-induced language change (see also Trudgill 2010). The argument will draw, for example, on the cultural meanings of the Afrikaans double negation, as well as the speech genres and verbal performances of Namibian *Kiche Duits*.

Throughout the paper I will critically engage with the relations of power that exist between the colonial condition and the European's engagement and interest in studying 'the other' (Irvine 2008, Errington 2008). Of particular concern is the imported notion of language 'standardization' – a quintessentially European concept and ideology which has shaped language histories on the African continent.

References

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