

German-Namibians and their Digital Speech Acts:

The (Re-)Negotiation between Smaller and Bigger German(ic) Varieties

Since the rise of computer-mediated communication (cmc), German-Namibians have established various digital networks in which they use several smaller and bigger varieties such as Afrikaans, English, Standard German and *Namdeutsch*. The latter one is a German vernacular which evolved in what is today Namibia during the course of the 20th century (Wiese et al. 2014, 2017; Wiese and Bracke 2019; Kellermeier-Rehbein 2016, 2015; Dück 2018; Shah 2007; Häusler 2017). How do users (re-)negotiate their multilingual linguistic practices in digital discourses? This question will be addressed through a self-compiled corpus entailing more than 8.000 digital speech acts published between 2002-2018. It is therefore an ideal tool to reveal the correlation between Namibian-specific language practices and sociolinguistic variables such as gender, place of birth and length of a digital message to analyze the role and function of the given languages for the German-Namibian online community. The object of the envisaged talk is to discuss the potential of smaller German(ic) varieties to understand the dynamics of language contact and language change in cmc. In doing so, the presentation takes into account that scientific research needs the concept of a smaller entity to be able to define its opposite. Without the 'periphery' there is no 'center', without a 'minority' there is no 'majority', hence without 'small(er) languages' there are no 'big(ger) languages'. Not only does research on smaller languages compliment, proof or challenge linguistic theory based on bigger languages, it can also gain more insight into how society functions as a whole by offering an analysis of its linguistic subgroups. The proposed presentation builds on this observation by examining the digital speech acts of German Namibians and their usage of several smaller and bigger German(ic) varieties online.

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