

# German as a contact language in South Africa: linguistic perspectives

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*This paper explores existing literature and linguistic research on German as spoken in South Africa from a language contact perspective. Following a brief overview of the situation of German speakers in South Africa, this paper presents a survey of various linguistic features of South African German, by drawing extensively on data from the study of German in South Africa by Stielau (1980). Structural changes in the morpho-syntax and syntax will be discussed in detail. I will conclude by briefly considering possessive pronoun constructions in South African German thereby reviewing the issue of explaining language change in language contact situations.*

**Key words:** contact linguistics; German in South Africa; syntactic change

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Speakers of German have been settling in Southern Africa since the beginning of the Dutch colonization at the Cape from the mid-17th century onwards (cf. Raidt 1983; Ponelis 1993; Bodenstein 1995; de Kadt 1995, 2000; Roberge 2002). The majority of the German settlers came from Lutheran backgrounds and were not allowed to establish self-governing settlements or Lutheran churches at the Cape until the mid-19th century (Bodenstein 1995:36; Ponelis 1993:19). Almost all of the colonists were men and rapidly assimilated, culturally and linguistically, into Cape Dutch/Afrikaans colonial society. It was only in the mid-19th century, when a continual influx of missionaries and settlers from mostly Northern Germany, that is mainly from the area of the *Lüneburger Heide*, migrated to South Africa that German speakers began to maintain their language and culture. These settlers and missionaries established German settlements in rural Natal, the eastern Cape and the south-western Transvaal, typically centred around a (Lutheran) church and a school. For generations, maintenance of German as a community language has been an integral part of these communities, and only the last fifty years have seen an increasing tendency of language shift to English and/or Afrikaans (Bodenstein 1995:36; Ponelis 1993:19).

This paper explores a number of structural features of German as a contact language in South Africa. Following a brief overview of German speakers in South Africa today, I will discuss various morpho-syntactical and syntactical features of South African German.<sup>2</sup> The analysis is primarily based on data provided by Stielau (1980), since Stielau's study is the only linguistic study of South African German to date. Finally, by looking at the case of possessive pronoun constructions in South African German in detail, I will also touch on the continuing issue of explaining language change in language contact situations.

## 2. German speakers in KwaZulu-Natal

At present German is still spoken in, what is today, rural KwaZulu-Natal, southern Mpumalanga and in the Northwest Province and major urban areas, such as Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town (de Kadt 1995, 2002; Field notes, Franke, 2005). According to census data from 1970 and 1980, the number of German speakers in South Africa is estimated to be around 45 000 (de Kadt 2002). Kamwangamalu (2001:365; based on Grobler et al. 1990:17) gives a total number of 40 240 for the late 1980s; this makes German the second largest European minority language after Portuguese (57 080 speakers in the late 1980s). The majority of German speakers live in urban areas, but there are also larger German farming communities in KwaZulu-Natal. Unfortunately, no current census figures are available since German is no longer listed separately as first language (1996 census) or as home language (2001 census); the South African census now subsumes German as home language within the category 'other language'.

As mentioned, a number of small, close-knit communities with a high proportion of German speakers still exist in rural KwaZulu-Natal, southern Mpumalanga and in the north-eastern Northwest Province. However, the larger the rural settlement, the lower the proportion of German speakers among the white (English and/or Afrikaans) population, and in some larger communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal it can be as low as five per cent of the white population (de Kadt 2002:150). German speakers in these settlements may thus be more integrated linguistically within the Afrikaans- or English-speaking farming communities, although German-medium primary schools and churches are often still maintained there.

The situation in urban areas, on the other hand, is more complex as speakers tend to be more scattered geographically across suburbs and do not necessarily form as close-knit networks as in rural areas (de Kadt 2002:150). This may not, however, be the case for every urban centre, since, in any case, German speakers in Cape Town—or at least a subset of them—form a communicative community with the local German high school as a focus point (A. Deumert, p.c.). German-medium schools, churches, and social clubs still exist in major urban areas, such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Durban, and communicative niches are thus likely to exist. Nonetheless, most German speakers in urban areas choose English- or Afrikaans-medium educational, religious, and/or social facilities (de Kadt 2002:150). Although the current state of research in this area warrants further attention, this paper focuses specifically on German as a contact language in the rural German-speaking communities.

German speakers in rural areas are typically multilingual, speaking German, English, and/or Afrikaans, and also frequently Zulu, a Bantu language, particularly on the farms (Stielau 1980; de Kadt 2002; Field notes, Franke, 2005). In contrast to speakers in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, German-speaking farmers in the Northwest Province may have competence in Afrikaans, English and Tswana (Field notes, Franke, 2005), with the latter being the most widely spoken language in this province (South African Census Data 2001). The linguistic situation in the rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal is succinctly summarized by Kamwangamalu (2001:364) as follows:

Some communities, e.g. the German communities in KwaZulu-Natal, ... have a well-developed network aimed at maintaining their languages ... These networks comprise private schools offering these languages as subjects and/or medium of learning; as well as after-school activities, cultural activities and church services conducted exclusively in these languages.

De Kadt (2002:150) reports that the use of German is generally restricted to the domains of family, church and, to some extent, school. Although English and Afrikaans media (e.g. newspapers, radio, television) exert an influence on the use and maintenance of German even in relatively homogeneous communities, social life within the community remains at this stage "mainly based on German" (de Kadt 2002:150). Despite the generally strong position of German within close-knit rural communities, there is a tendency towards language shift, especially among the larger rural communities, among younger speakers, and among those who intermarry with English or Afrikaans speakers. Among the German speakers there is therefore an increasing "awareness ... that the next two generations may well see an irrevocable decrease in numbers" (de Kadt 2002:150; cf. also Schaberg & Barkhuizen 1998). Judging from the current research, maintenance of German thus depends on three main factors: place of residence, age, and intermarriage.

### 3. Linguistic perspectives—Stielau's (1980) study

#### 3.1 Previous research

Research into the German communities in South Africa has so far been fairly limited. Several overview articles, rather similar in scope and content, exist, dealing with the language situation of the German communities (cf. de Kadt 1995, 1998, 2002; Bodenstern 1995). There have been a few more in-depth studies investigating issues of language maintenance and shift (Grüner 1979; Schaberg & Barkhuizen 1998; de Kadt 2000); however, detailed linguistic analyses of the structure of South African German (SAG)<sup>3</sup> are still missing. Although de Kadt (2001) briefly discusses observations regarding the language use in the German community of Wartburg, the only linguistic study of South African German is Stielau (1980). Although Stielau aims to document the effects the language contact with English, Afrikaans, and Zulu/Fanagalo<sup>4</sup> has had on SAG, her study remains a loose, and largely unanalysed, collection of lexical items and various examples of morpho-syntactical and syntactical features of (written) SAG. One can find only brief comments on the origin of lexical items and various structural features, which are interspersed in her study, and a relatively condensed summary. Unfortunately, it constitutes neither an in-depth analysis of the language contact outcomes on SAG, nor a comprehensive description of the structure of German as spoken in KwaZulu-Natal.

Even though Stielau's study displays several limitations in its theoretical framework, methodology and analysis of the language data (cf. also Schweizer 1982; Schaberg & Barkhuizen 1998; de Kadt 2000, 2001), it nonetheless presents a wealth of raw data upon which this paper draws heavily. I will therefore give a brief outline of her methodology here. Her main methodological approach appears to be anecdotal in nature. In order to examine lexical borrowings and structural features of South African German, Stielau noted down "particularities" (*Besonderheiten*; p.9; my translation), essentially "neologisms and deviations" (*Neubildungen und Abweichungen*; p.7; my translation), she noticed in the speech of German speakers in KwaZulu-Natal over a number of years (mid-1960s). Her collection of primary (written) data is of a limited size, consisting of students' essays and exams, and a few letters that were available to Stielau (p.7-8). Based on the "variation [found] in the language use of Natal Germans" (p.8; my translation), Stielau designed a translation exercise to examine sentence structure and word order. This exercise involved the translation of 70 sentences from either English or Afrikaans into German. In addition, participants were also asked to translate word lists (items referring to everyday life such as *shampoo* and *fridge*) in order to gather data for the purpose of future quantitative analysis. Participants came from three regions in KwaZulu-Natal and were divided into three groups: a) students from the German high school in Hermannsburg, midlands KwaZulu-Natal (65 participants, aged 16-18 years), b) speakers from Northern KwaZulu-Natal (25 participants, all ages), and c) speakers from Durban and Izotsha, Southern KwaZulu-Natal (25 participants, all ages).

This paper re-examines and analyses Stielau's data within a language contact framework (cf. Thomason & Kaufman 1988) thereby seeking to shed light on current tendencies of language change within SAG (contact-induced, i.e. external, as well as language-internal changes). Stielau's comments on various features are taken into consideration where applicable, however, as noted above, these are sparse and lack proper analysis.

#### 3.2 Morphosyntax

Stielau (1980:42) contends that the morpho-syntactical integration of lexical borrowings into SAG is characterised by the development of inflections, namely number markings, for nouns and verbal inflections for verbs. I will first discuss developments that have taken place within nominal inflections, followed by an outline of changes within the verbal paradigm.

##### 3.2.1 Nouns

Nouns in German are inflected for case, though rarely overt, and number according to several inflection types. Eisenberg (2002:362-363) distinguishes three main declension types, based on gender: *strong* (type 1), *weak* (type 2), and *feminine* (type 3) nominal inflections. The majority of neuter nouns and those masculine nouns which do not belong to the type 2 (weak) declensions comprise the strong class and form the plural by suffixing *-e*, e.g. *das Bein - die Bein-e* 'leg', *der Tisch - die Tisch-e* 'table', except for some neuter nouns, which are pluralised by adding *-er*, such as *das Kind - die Kind-er* 'child'. Type 2 (weak) declensions comprise masculine nouns, which have the plural suffix *-en*, e.g. *der Mensch - die Mensch-en*

'human being'. Type 3 includes feminine nouns, which also mark the plural by adding *-en*, such as *die Burg - die Burg-en* 'castle'. Type 3 nouns, however, do not overtly display case endings as compared to strong and weak nouns, which may display case inflections overtly. Moreover, nouns may also form the plural by adding umlaut<sup>5</sup> and a plural suffix, e.g. *der Bach - die Bäch-e* 'brook', *das Haus - die Häus-er* 'house', *die Stadt - die Städt-e* 'town'. In addition to these three declension types, the plural *s*-suffix, e.g. *der Park - die Park-s* 'park', is becoming more wide-spread and "very productive because it is in use for large parts of the non-native vocabulary" (Eisenberg 2002:363). An exception to these types are nouns ending in *-er* or *-el*, which generally do not add a plural suffix (zero-suffix), e.g. *der Eimer - die Eimer* 'bucket', *der Stiefel - die Stiefel* 'boot'. Morpho-syntactically integrated nouns in SAG are characterised by being inflected according to one of the three noun declension types (Stielau 1980:42-43), such as in (1), (2) and (3).

(1)	type 1	<i>der Spielgrund</i> the playground.sg	<i>die Spielgründ-e</i> the playground.pl
(2)	type 2	<i>der Magistrat</i> the magistrate.sg	<i>die Magistrat-en</i> the magistrate.pl
(3)	type 3	<i>die Fenz</i> the fence.sg	<i>die Fenz-en</i> the fence.pl

Non-integrated nouns, that is, according to Stielau (1980:11), nouns which retain their English or Afrikaans pronunciation, form the plural by suffixing *-s*, as in (4), which, as mentioned previously, has become the default plural for non-native (i.e. borrowed) nouns but also neologisms in colloquial standard German (and also English) in general (cf. Clahsen et al. 1992).

(4)	<i>die Ladder</i> the ladder.sg 'ladder in stocking'	<i>die Ladder-s</i> the ladder.pl
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In some cases the *s*-plural marking also exists alongside other plural forms (Stielau 1980:43), such as in (5), which may point to varying degrees of integration or linguistic uncertainty of speakers.

(5)	<i>der Kraal</i> the stock pen.sg	<i>die Kräl-e</i> the stock pen.pl	<i>die Kraal-s</i> the stock pen.pl
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As can also be seen in (5), one of the plural forms of *Kraal*, *Kräle*, has not only developed the plural suffix *-e* but also umlaut. This, however, is not an unusual phenomenon, since, as Wiese (1996:133) points out, umlaut is "wide-spread through the derivational and inflectional morphology, [and] it can also be productive, in limited ways". McMahon (1994:105) also mentions that German displays some tendency to develop new umlaut plurals for nouns where no vowel change to umlaut existed previously. As seen in (6), the plurals for *Strand* 'beach' and *Zwang* 'compulsion' have undergone vowel changes and now display umlaut in the plural: *Strände* and *Zwänge*, respectively.

(6)	<i>der Strand - die Strande</i> > <i>die Strände</i> 'the beach/beaches'
	<i>der Zwang - die Zwange</i> > <i>die Zwänge</i> 'the compulsion/compulsions'

The occurrence of umlaut in nouns, such as in *Kräl-e* 'stock pens' and also in *Höck-e* 'small stock pens' is thus in line with general language change tendencies in colloquial standard German.

### 3.2.2 Verbs

There are two classes of verbs in German, regular (weak) and irregular (strong) verbs, both of which have inflected (finite) forms in the present and past tense. Most verbs follow the regular (weak) verbal paradigm as only about 170 irregular verbs remain, all of which are lexicalised. This class has been decreasing in number as irregular verbs move into the regular verb class (Wells 1985:166), but standardisation and codification have largely halted this trend. Within linguistic theory, the distinction of regular and irregular inflections has been explained in terms of a dual-mechanism structure

of the mental language faculty. This model distinguishes between “lexically based inflection versus inflection based on combinatorial rules” (Clahsen 1999:994), i.e. regular inflection which is productive, open-ended and rule-governed, and irregular inflection, which is idiosyncratic, closed, and whose lexical entries are stored in the mental lexicon (cf. also Pinker & Prince 1994; Pinker 1998).

Stielau (1980:46) contends that, in contrast to nouns, borrowed verbs in SAG are always integrated phonologically (i.e. they no longer retain their English or Afrikaans pronunciation) and morphologically, and inflect following the paradigm of regular verbs. The inflection of borrowed verbs according to the regular verbal paradigm is expected since many irregular verbs have gradually moved into the regular verb class in German.

As mentioned in Section 3.2.1, there is a tendency for vowel changes (to umlaut) in noun plurals in SAG and in colloquial standard German (cf. (5) and (6)). A similar trend towards vowel changes, in this case vowel alternation (ablaut6), can also be observed in the present tense inflections in a number of regular verbs in SAG (Stielau 2000:212), as in (7) and (8). These do not generally display changes to ablaut in German, since ablaut is only typical for the second- and third-person singular present indicative of irregular verbs, such as *laufen* (Eisenberg 2002:370).

(7)	irregular verb		SAG	Std. German
		<i>laufen</i>	<i>du läufst</i>	<i>du läufst</i>
		‘to run’	‘you run’	‘you run’

(8)	regular verb		SAG	Std. German
		<i>kaufen</i>	<i>du käufst</i>	<i>du kaufst</i>
		‘to buy’	‘you buy’	‘you buy’

Clahsen (1999:996) maintains, from a language acquisition perspective, that strong (irregular) inflections may be extended by analogy to apply to regular verbs, i.e. regular verbs may be inflected according to the irregular verbal paradigm for reasons of similarity. Thus speakers may tend to overgeneralise and analyse a regular verb like *kaufen* as an irregular verb due to its resemblance to *laufen*. Furthermore, *kaufen* may also be inflected following the irregular paradigm (*käufst*) in colloquial standard German (A. Deumert, p.c.).

Stielau (1980:212) further mentions the loss of ablaut in the inflection of some irregular verbs where colloquial standard German displays vowel changes to /i/, /ä/, or /ö/ in the present tense indicative (9), and in a number of imperative forms of irregular verbs, as in (10). The overall development of regular verbal inflections for irregular verbs follows the expected direction of language change as irregular verbs move into the regular verb class, although in the instance of *nehmen* the vowel change might also be due to influence from Afrikaans.

(9)		SAG	Std. German
	<i>befehlen</i>	<i>er befehlt</i>	<i>er befiehlt</i>
	‘to command’	‘he commands’	‘he commands’
(10)		SAG	Std. German
	<i>nehmen</i>	<i>nehm</i>	<i>nimm</i>
		2nd sg imperative	2nd sg imperative
	‘to take’	‘take’	‘take’

A preference for the regular paradigm is also noticeable in slips of the tongue, e.g. *ratete* ‘guessed’ instead of *riet*, and in child language acquisition where children may over-apply regular verb inflections to irregular verbs during the early stages of first language acquisition (Wurzel 1989:64-5).

### 3.2.3 Case marking

Concerning the case system of SAG, genitive case has largely disappeared and is being replaced by possessive pronoun constructions (cf. Section 4 for a discussion). There also seems to be convergence of accusative (11) and dative case (12), as seen in the examples below (Stielau 1980:218, 223).

- (11) *ich hoffe sie wird ihm heiraten*  
 I hope she will he.DAT marry  
 'I hope she will marry him'
- (12) *er hat mich den Butterkuchen mitgebracht*  
 he has I.ACC the.ACC teacake with-bring.PP  
 'he brought me the teacake'

Stielau (1980:218) points out that the merging of accusative and dative case is, at present, largely restricted to pronouns, which, on the one hand, is due to case merging tendencies evident in German dialects, e.g. in Low German the first person singular pronoun *mi* is regularly used as both the accusative and dative case pronoun (cf. Goltz & Walker 1989, on North Saxon dialects; Schönfeld 1989, on East Low German). A tendency towards a single oblique case can also be observed in colloquial German, especially in "those types of non-standard speech which have no dative-accusative distinction" (Barbour & Stevenson 1990:161). On the other hand, the convergence of pronouns is also supported by the contact with Afrikaans and English, both of which have one form for all oblique case pronouns. This structural similarity may have thus accelerated the merging of dative and accusative pronouns, yet it should also be noted that Germanic languages in general display tendencies towards a single marker for all oblique cases, i.e. Dutch has lost the dative/accusative distinction, as well as Scandinavian languages (e.g. Norwegian, Swedish, Danish) and also Frisian (cf. König & van der Auwera 2002).

### 3.3 Syntax

According to Stielau (1980), SAG has undergone some major changes in word order and infinitive clause constructions. In contrast to, for example, English, word order in German is relatively free, although there is "a complex system of braces, dividing the main constituent types into strictly separated fields" (Eisenberg 2002:381). The movement of constituents is still relatively free because noun phrases and pronouns are marked for case to indicate their syntactic function in the sentence, i.e. subject, object, etc., as in (13) and (14). The basic word order for main clauses and *wh*-questions is SVO (V2), whereas standard subordinate clauses display SOV order (V-final).

- (13) *Peter sieht den Mann*  
 Peter sees the man.ACC  
 'Peter sees the man'
- (14) *den Mann sieht Peter*  
 the man.ACC sees Peter  
 'Peter sees the man'

In this section I will examine word order changes in SAG, in particular *Ausklammerung* of adverbial constructions and movement of negation constituents, followed by a brief discussion of structural changes in infinitival constructions in SAG.

#### 3.3.1 Word Order

Regarding word order changes, Stielau (1980:237) mentions *Ausklammerung* (dislocation of sentence constituents) of prepositional and adverbial constructions as a typical feature of SAG as in (15).

- (15) *er wird eine Antwort kriegen auf alle Fragen - SAG*  
 he will an answer get to all questions

*er wird auf alle Fragen eine Antwort kriegen* - Std. German  
 he will to all question an answer get  
 'he will get an answer to all his questions'

Although Stielau (1980:223) maintains that English word order has had a marked influence on the use of dislocation in SAG, *Ausklammerung* of adverbial or prepositional constituents is not uncommon in colloquial, spoken German (A. Deumert, p.c.). The position of adverbs or adverbial constructions within the clause seems to be unstable in colloquial standard German generally, which indicates that constituent dislocation is not an unusual phenomenon as such.

In addition to rightward dislocation, Stielau (1980:225) provides some examples of leftward constituent movement. The adverbs *besser* 'better' (16) and *schon* 'already' (17) seem to display a particular tendency to undergo movement. However, in the case of the leftward movement of *schon*, one might also argue for rightward dislocation of the adverbial of time *die ganze Zeit*.

(16) *du besser gehst früh schlafen*  
 you better go early sleep  
 'you'd better go to bed early'

(17) *du warst schon hier die ganze Zeit*  
 you were already here the whole time  
 'you were here all the time'

Regardless of how one conceives of the constituent dislocation, Stielau (1980:225) fails to recognise the striking difference between the position of *besser* and *schon*, as both adverbials cannot have undergone the same syntactical movement. In contrast to (17), where *schon* occupies the position to the adjacent position to the right of the finite verb, in (16) *besser* is moved to the left of the finite verb thereby violating the V2-constraint in German. As mentioned, German, like other Germanic languages such as Dutch (Koster 1975) and Afrikaans (Donaldson 2002), has an underlying SOV structure with V2 in declarative sentences. Hence, the movement of the constituent *besser* to a position to the left of the finite verb is highly unusual, unless one interprets *du besser gehst* as an unanalysed loan translation in which case *besser* is not interpreted as an adverb but as a lexical item as part of the English phrase *you'd better*. Whether the adverb *besser* undergoes leftward dislocation in SAG indeed or whether it constitutes an unanalysed loan translation remains unclear at present and requires further clarification.

Leftward movement of the negation particle *nicht* 'not' also seems to be common in SAG: *nicht* frequently occurs to the right of the auxiliary or modal in SAG, as illustrated in (18).

(18) *ich kann nicht diese traurige Geschichte vergessen* - SAG  
 I can not this sad story forget  
  
*ich kann diese traurige Geschichte nicht vergessen* - Std. German  
 I can this sad story not forget  
 'I cannot forget this sad story'

In colloquial standard German the movement of *nicht* is relatively free and *nicht* may occupy a variety of clause positions depending on the position of other clause constituents, altering the meaning of the clause slightly, as in (19 a and b).

(19a) *er kommt oft nicht*  
 he comes often not  
 'he often doesn't come'

(19b) *er kommt nicht oft*  
 he comes not often  
 'he doesn't come often'

Stielau (1980:225) argues that the leftward movement of *nicht* to a position right of the finite verb is due to strong influence from English where the negator *not* always occurs to the right of the auxiliary or modal, e.g. *do not, must not*. According to the examples given by Stielau (1980:225), the negator *nicht* may also move to the right of lexical verbs in SAG as in (20).

- (20) *sie zerlegt nicht das Epos in zwei gleiche Hälften* - SAG  
 she splits not the epic in two same halves  
  
*sie zerlegt das Epos nicht in zwei gleiche Hälften* - Std. German  
 'she does not split the epic into two similar parts'

However, in example (21) it is actually possible for *nicht* to occur in a position adjacent to the right of the finite verb, in the case of *nicht* negating only the noun phrase *das Epos*, i.e. it is a case of constituent negation and not clause negation.

- (21) *sie zerlegt nicht das Epos in zwei gleiche Hälften, sondern den Roman*  
 she splits not the epic in two same halves but the novel  
 'she does not split the epic into two similar parts but the novel'

Since *nicht* may occur to the right of (finite) main verbs in SAG, contact with Afrikaans may, in fact, have had an influence on this change of word order. In Afrikaans, the negator *nie* 'not' always occurs to the right of the finite verb, and is complemented in compound sentences by the second, obligatory and scope-marking, *nie* (Donaldson 2002:501-502). In contrast, in standard English the negator *not* cannot follow the main verb but appears after the first auxiliary or after the dummy verb *do* (König 2002:561). Seeing that Stielau (1980:225) explicitly mentions that *nicht* may move to a position adjacent to the finite (main) verb, as is possible only in Afrikaans (among the contact languages), one could assume that these changes may be due to the contact with Afrikaans and not English, or both.

With the exception of the dislocation of the adverb *besser*, left- and rightward movement of clause constituents (i.e. adverbial or prepositional constructions, and the negator *nicht*) in SAG is also common in colloquial standard German. It seems clear that the SVO/V2 structure of German is generally stable, as furthermore evident in other extraterritorial varieties of German, such as Pennsylvania German (van Ness 2002). The SOV structure of SAG does not seem to be influenced by English syntax (SVO) with the exception of the adverb *besser*, which may be due to the fact that German is in contact with both an SVO (English) and an SOV (Afrikaans) language in South Africa. Since Afrikaans also displays V2/V-final, German is in close contact with a language that has a very similar syntax, as seen in (22) and (23).

- (22) *gister het die man met sy dogter gepraat* - Afrikaans  
*gestern hat der Mann mit seiner Tochter gesprochen* - Std. German  
 yesterday the man spoke to his daughter  
  
 (23) *hy glimlag omdat dit 'n goeie grappie was* - Afrikaans  
*er lächelt, weil es ein guter Witz war* - Std. German  
 he is smiling because it was a good joke

### 3.3.2 Infinitive clause constructions

German distinguishes between bare infinitives (24), infinitives with *zu* (25), and infinitive constructions with *um...zu* (26) (Eisenberg 1986:362). Bare infinitives occur only with a small group of finite verbs, such as modals, copulas or verbs of perceiving (as in *sie hörte die Kinder lachen* 'she heard the children laughing'). The infinitive construction with *um...zu* is generally regarded as an adverbial (subordinate) infinitive construction (adverbial of purpose), in contrast to the infinitive with *zu*, which is a verbal infinitive construction, occurring in all other instances (Eisenberg 2002:381).

- (24) *er kann lesen*  
 he can read  
 'he is able to read'

- (25) *er hofft gesund zu sein*  
 he hopes healthy to be  
 'he hopes he is healthy'
- (26) *er studiert um Lehrer zu werden*  
 he studies for teacher to become  
 'he is studying to become a teacher'

According to Stielau (1980:213), infinitive clause constructions in SAG are frequently formed with the complementiser *um* and the infinitival marker *zu*, as illustrated in (27). This construction is also increasingly used in formal standard German and informal (colloquial) spoken varieties of German (Deumert 2004:204).

- (27) *er ist bereit um zu sterben* - SAG  
*er ist bereit zu sterben* - Std. German  
 he is ready for to die  
 'he is ready to die'

Stielau (1980:213-214) argues that, although the origin of this construction is to be found in language change tendencies of German in general, the habitual use of *um...zu* in SAG has been supported by contact with Afrikaans, which also shows generalisation of *om...te* (replacing the Dutch 'te construction'; Deumert 2004:204).

#### 4. Explaining language change

Time and again, one may find in Stielau's study lexical items and grammatical structures that have been attributed to contact interference from English or Afrikaans, when in fact their origin can easily be located in German dialects or even colloquial standard German. The periphrastic possessive is a case in point. Stielau (1980:215) states that the loss of genitive case through replacement with possessive pronoun constructions is influenced by contact with Afrikaans, where a similar construction exists. De Kadt (2001:73), in contrast, contends that South African German has not yet lost genitive case completely, as it is still used, in any case, by German speakers of the Wartburg German community. Moreover, the periphrastic pronoun constructions in German and Afrikaans, although similar on the surface, differ substantially in their structure: where German employs a possessive pronoun, which is marked for case, number, and gender (Eisenberg 1986), Afrikaans uses the invariant possessive marker *se*, as illustrated in (28), (29) and (30).

- (28) *in Kaiser seinem Drama* - SAG  
*in Kaiser se drama* - Afrikaans  
 in Kaiser his play  
 'in Kaiser's play'
- (29) *die Mutter ihre Sünde* - SAG  
*die moeder se sonde* - Afrikaans  
 the mother her sin  
 'the mother's sin'
- (30) *Werner und Just ihr Auto* - SAG  
*Werner en Just se kar* - Afrikaans  
 Werner and Just their car  
 'Werner and Just's car'

Deumert (2004:212, following Den Besten) describes Afrikaans *se* as a free and invariant "possessive particle [+Gen] which cliticises to the preceding noun phrase". Substitution of genitive marking with a possessive pronoun construction also frequently occurs in colloquial standard German. Many German dialects have lost genitive case entirely, and either employ possessive pronoun constructions or express possession through the use of the preposition *von*, which corresponds to the English possessive paraphrase construction with *of*, e.g. *das Haus von meinem Vater* 'the house of my father' (cf., for example, Goltz & Walker 1989 on North Saxon; Durrell 1989 on Westphalian and Eastphalian; Schönfeld 1989 on East Low German; Newton 1989 on Central Franconian). Furthermore, the possessive pronoun construction is not a recent

phenomenon, but is historically deeply rooted in the syntax of German. The following example (31) is a well-known phrase and stems from one of Grimm's Fairy Tales, 'Rumpelstiltskin', first published in the early 19th century.

- (31) *der Königin ihr Kind* - German  
*die koningin se kind* - Afrikaans  
 'the queen's child'

The case of the periphrastic possessive illustrates the problem we face when trying to explain language change in language contact situations. In a seminal paper Lass and Wright (1986) caution against the attribution of language changes that arise in contact situations to external (i.e. language contact) factors alone. They argue that internal factors, i.e. language change tendencies, need to be carefully taken into consideration as well, since language changes may arise out of a multiplicity of conditions and factors. Similarly, Roberge (2002:168) notes in his discussion of the history of the Afrikaans brace negation that "[i]t is not always either one thing or another in the evolution of such a delicate social phenomenon as human language". The position of Lass and Wright (1986) can be summarised as follows: In a situation where two languages  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  are in contact and both display a common feature  $F$ , which is presumably original to  $L_2$ , there are four possible explanations regarding the development of the particular feature  $F$  in question. Firstly,  $F$  could be borrowed from  $L_2$  into  $L_1$ . Secondly,  $L_1$  originally had some tendency to develop towards  $F$ ; this development was then reinforced by the presence of a similar feature in  $L_2$  (i.e. an acceleration of the development through the contact occurred). Thirdly,  $F$  could have developed independently in  $L_1$ , i.e. the co-presence in  $L_1$  and  $L_2$  is convergent. Or as a fourth possibility,  $F$  was actually much more typical of  $L_1$  in the first place, "it only seems so innovatory because historians have not looked at the right dialects (regional or temporal) of  $L_1$ , or have misinterpreted the early settlement history" (Lass & Wright 1986:203). Lass and Wright (1986:202) comment that the fourth explanation is actually a subcase of the second one. Stielau's (1980) analysis of the possessive pronoun construction in SAG draws on the first explanation by concluding that German has borrowed the possessive pronoun structure from Afrikaans. However, upon closer analysis, it becomes apparent that the features in question are structurally different: in the case of Afrikaans we are dealing with an invariant possessive marker *se*, in the case of German with an inflected possessive pronoun (which shows gender and number agreement with the possessor). This structural difference alone suggests that straightforward borrowing as suggested by Stielau cannot be the sole explanation of the phenomenon. Moreover, possessive pronoun constructions can also be found in German dialects, i.e. the feature is original to the  $L_1$  (explanation 4). It is, however, possible that the gradual loss of the sigmatic genitive and the increase of periphrastic constructions may have been accelerated through the contact with Afrikaans (explanation 2). In other words, although the  $L_2$  may not provide an explanation for the origin of the structure, it might have contributed to the spread of the construction in SAG.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper re-examined data from Stielau's (1980) study on South African German in detail, by briefly considering lexical borrowing in SAG and, in greater detail, morpho-syntactical and syntactical features of SAG. At first glance, South African German might strongly resemble colloquial standard German in its structural features, yet some interesting phenomena can nevertheless be observed, notably the development of ablaut in regular verbs by analogy with irregular verbs and the wide-spread use of the *um...zu* infinitive construction, which may be attributed to influence from Afrikaans. In the instance of the adverbial phrase *du besser gehst* 'you'd better' one could argue that this represents an unanalysed loan translation from English or constitutes a case of leftward constituent dislocation, in this case also due to influence from English. Stielau's data collection does not provide sufficient examples to arrive at a conclusive argument though. Hence, further documentation is needed to clarify this issue.

Other developments, such as the movement of irregular verbs into the regular verbal paradigm (e.g. the loss of ablaut in irregular verbs), the loss of genitive case marking, and case reduction (i.e. convergence of dative and accusative case to form a single oblique case), can also be observed. These, however, may not be contact-induced changes but are rather in accordance with general language change tendencies within colloquial standard German. Without any doubt, the German spoken in rural South Africa has undergone changes but since Stielau's study does not constitute a comprehensive documentation of features, it is difficult to fully ascertain (based on the current literature) whether changes are indeed

contact-induced or whether equally plausible explanations for change need to be sought elsewhere (e.g. Low German dialects, colloquial standard German, or even general tendencies within Germanic languages). For the moment, our understanding of linguistic features and tendencies of language change within SAG remains somewhat limited.

#### Notes

1. I would like to express my appreciation to Ana Deumert, who provided numerous insightful and excellent comments and ideas on many drafts of this paper. I thank Heinz Kreutz who also commented on earlier drafts. Finally, I am indebted to the two anonymous reviewers for their many suggestions and comments.

2. The issue of an adequate reference point is not a straightforward one and the use of any term, such as colloquial standard, supra-regional standard, metropolitan standard, spoken standard, etc. is problematic. For the purpose of this paper, however, I have decided to use 'colloquial standard' as a reference point, following Barbour and Stevenson's (1990:136) definition for colloquial standard German as a variety which is,

different from the formal standard [...] though regionally differentiated, nevertheless shows considerable uniformity in grammar, and sufficient uniformity in pronunciation and vocabulary, for generally easy communication between speakers from different regions. It differs markedly from non-standard German in that it does not contain certain clearly non-standard grammatical constructions, and contains localized vocabulary only to a limited extent.

3. For the purpose of this paper, I will refer to the German as spoken by rural German speakers in South Africa as South African German (SAG). However, whether the variety spoken by rural German speakers can indeed be distinguished from other varieties of German spoken in South Africa, e.g. by recent immigrants in urban areas, or from the so-called colloquial standard (mainland) German requires further clarification and will thus not be addressed in this paper. Furthermore, variation within the rural variety of SAG may exist, e.g. between communities in southern KwaZulu-Natal and Northern KwaZulu-Natal or even between individual speakers. Again, this issue will be addressed elsewhere.

4. Fanagalo is a "pidginised form of Zulu" (Mesthrie 1991:17), which was spoken in the mines in Johannesburg and was acquired by male migrant labourers. Fanagalo is based on English, Afrikaans, and Zulu, and carries strongly negative connotations in South Africa (because of its link to migrant labour exploitation).

5. Crystal (2003:480) defines *umlaut* as "a term describing a sound change in which a sound is influenced by the vowel in the following syllable"; this process is also known as *vowel mutation* (cf. Wells 1985). This usage stands in contrast to popular practice, which often refers to the signs in written German, namely ä, ö, ü, only (Fox 1990:66).

6. Wells (1985:162) defines *ablaut* as "[t]he regular alternation of root vowels in the strong [irregular] verb formation", such as *sing, sang, sung*.

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