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GLOBAL ENGLISH IN ITS LOCAL CONTEXTS: MANIFESTATIONS OF THE SOCIAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE STRATIFICATION IN NAMIBIA. PART 1: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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Abstract

The ever more popular and global use of English in the world is an undeniable fact. One of the obvious manifestations of this process is the selection of English as an official language, typically in former post-colonial states. Its global status, however, also motivates some African and Asian countries which have never been a part of the British Commonwealth to choose this tongue as an official state language (sometimes – the only official language) too. Does this decision assume that the citizens of those states know English fluently? How is English integrated in their everyday life? The case study of Namibian newspaper articles and personal advertisements from classified pages as well as billboard texts is an attempt to offer some insights into the use of the variety of English typical of this country both in the official and private milieu in writing. The objective of the study, presented in two parts (Part 1: theoretical background and Part 2: analysis of data) is to outline the unique context of the use of English in Namibia and describe the most characteristic features of Namibian English grammar when compared to Standard British English and on the basis of the results illustrate the existence of a social dialect continuum with regard to the use of the English language to be detected in the analysed written texts.

The following discussion has been triggered by an encounter with English as a global language that is used in Namibia. The short history of a recently established state and, consequently, the brief period of the use of English as the official language there

constitute the background for a discussion of some aspects of the English language landscape in Namibia and its systemic features in that relatively unknown part of the English-speaking world.

English in Namibia appears to be a rather unique case when compared to other varieties of English used in the world. It is an African variety of English spoken in Southern Africa. Varieties of English used in most parts of that continent, along with those spoken in Asia and the Pacific have for the last 30 years or so been classified by linguists as new varieties of English, or New Englishes (cf. Kachru 1985, 1992; McArthur 1998; Kirkpatrick 2007; Mesthrie, Bhatt 2008; Jenkins 2009, 2014, etc.). Also, following a number of classification models developed over the last few decades (cf. Görlach 1995; McArthur 1998; Modiano 1999ab) and notably the one by Kachru (1985, 1992), whose classification, as the most popular, will broadly be followed here, which attempted to categorize various manifestations of English in the world in terms of its geographical distribution and status as the first, second or foreign language, African varieties of English belong, according to Kachru's model, to the so-called Outer Circle (cf. Melchers, Shaw 2011). They are to be understood as varieties used as a second language in countries which were formerly British colonies, and, having gained independence, for a variety of reasons, decided to continue using English as the official (or one of the official) state language(s) (cf. Crystal 2003).

Namibian English, however, rarely features among specifically investigated African varieties (cf. Stell 2014; Buschfeld 2014), and if it does, the main reason for the analysis is the evaluation of its language policy as well as its educational repercussions (cf. Beck 1995; Pütz 1995ab, 2000, 2004; Harlech-Jones 1995ab; Maho 1998, Cantoni 2007; Frydman 2011), with a number of publications by Cluver (1990, 1992, 1993, 2000) and Stell (2009, 2014) taking a broader perspective on the linguistic relations within Namibia. The language policy and planning in Namibia are the reason why Namibian English constitutes a rather non-prototypical case among African Englishes ranked as post-colonial English varieties, for Namibia not only became independent much later than most other African states, i.e. in 1990 (cf. Cluver 1993, after Deumert 2009; Frydman 2011; Stell 2014), but it had also never been a part of the British Commonwealth. This means that the use of English as an official language had never been the case in Namibia during the colonial period (cf. Buschfeld 2014), contrary to a number of other African countries, e.g. Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Botswana, Zambia, etc. Thus, when Namibia became an independent state in 1990, the decision to designate English as the official state language was not a consequence of its earlier use and acquaintance with it during the colonial period, as in the other states (besides their wanting to maintain English as a neutral language in view of a possible competition between local tongues and, consequently, a struggle of tribes for power in the state and the need to prevent internal upheavals this way) (Mesthrie 2009; cf. Platt et al. 1984). In fact, the resolution to employ English as the state language was made long before the country gained its independence – it hails back to the SWAPO's (South-West African People's Organisation), the country's liberation movement, policy of 1981 in cooperation with the United Nations Institute of Namibia (cf. Deumert 2009; Stell 2014), with its objective laid out as follows: “[t]he aim

of introducing English is to introduce an official language that will steer the people away from lingo-tribal affiliations and differences and create conditions conducive to national unity in the realm of language” (Deumert 2009: 393).

1. Historical context and language policy

During its pre-independence history Namibia, first discovered for Europe by Bartholomeo Diaz in 1486, was a German colony between 1884–1915 (cf. Pütz 1995a; Stell 2014), the wide stretches of empty desert lands having attracted Europeans because of diamonds and other minerals, which resulted in first settlements in Lüderitzland and South West Africa in general (cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*). Although during the time of the German dominion the indigenous languages were accepted in Namibia, the official language of the state was German. Between 1904 and 1907 a major genocide of two indigenous tribes, Herero and Nama, took place. After World War I, in 1919, however, Germans lost their African lands in the south-western part of Africa, and the territory of today’s Namibia, as a result of the decision of the League of Nations, fell under the legal domination of South Africa (Pütz 1995a; Stell 2014), some of its area (Walvis Bay and Penguin Islands) having become a part of the Cape Colony as early as 1878 (Wilken, Fox 1978; Stell 2014). Eventually it became a part of the Union of South Africa in 1910 (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). In the years to follow the German language lost its former status in Namibia, though it continued to be used in big cities (Stell 2009), and the tongues which were promoted to the official status in the country were Afrikaans and English, yet it was Afrikaans that was used by the government and administration of the state (Stell 2009; Frydman 2011). When in 1948 the Nationalist Party won the majority in the Republic of South Africa, the country applied the apartheid policy, which affected Namibia as well (Meredith 1988; Frydman 2011).

Already in the years preceding the independence Namibian pre-independence government, contrary to the Republic of South Africa, which is marked by a particularly wide plethora of official languages (11 in total: Afrikaans, English, Ndebele, Northern Sotho, Southern Sotho, Swati, Tsonga, Tswana, Venda, Xhosa, Zulu), decided for the language policy of monolingualism (Frydman 2011; Stell 2014). In view of Haugen’s (1966) analysis of language standardization such a move is understandable and desired by the state, for it is aimed at maintaining the country’s homogeneous and united character, and it prevents the formation of internal divides, which the use of different languages by different groups might encourage. However, Namibia not only has 13 language groups within its bounds, represented by 10 to 30 different languages and dialects (Maho 1998), these including Bantu speaking groups, Khoesan speaking groups and Indo-European speaking groups, the latter being Afrikaans, German and English (cf. Pütz 1995a; Frydman 2011; Stell 2014), but English is used as a native tongue by barely 0.5%–0.8% of the 2-million-plus population (cf. Pütz 1995ab; Brock-Utne, Holmarsdottir 2001; Trudgill, Hannah 2008). According to *Ethnologue* (<http://www.ethnologue.com/language/eng>) there were 10,200 users of English

as a native tongue in 2006, whereas Crystal (2003) additionally mentions that it is a second language of 300,000 inhabitants there. In other words, the language of the smallest fraction of the population of Namibia has been selected to be the only official language of the whole state (cf. Frydman 2011). And not only is the official tongue the language of the smallest minority, but also one which does not continue the language of the formal colonial power governing Namibia, contrary to the most frequent policy accepted by the majority of post-colonial states. With such a history of its development and the conditions of its present use an unavoidable outcome has been a diversification of its frequency of use and quality of the language in terms of adherence to its extraterritorial standard norms that depends mostly on the social and tribal characteristics of its users. This, in consequence, must have resulted in the development of the social dialect continuum with the acrolectal variety of the best educated users, through mesolectal variants down to the basilectal level of the least socially affluent citizens of Namibia. The present paper aims at demonstrating the existence of the aforementioned social diversification within English on the basis of a selection of written texts.

Compared to its neighbouring countries, Namibia's language policy is rather unusual. It appears to be closest to that of Mozambique, which is also a monolingual state, its official language being Portuguese, as these lands used to be a Portuguese colony till 1975 (cf. Lopes 2004). With about 20 indigenous languages competing for power in the independent state the choice of the neutral Portuguese appeared to be quite a natural option as a safeguard of the country's stability. There have since been attempts to promote a local tongue to a more equal position to that of Portuguese in education, not yet with satisfying results, however (cf. Lopes 2004; Frydman 2011). In Botswana and Malawi, Namibia's other neighbours, both of which used to be British colonies (Malawi gained its independence in 1964 and Botswana in 1966) (cf. Frydman 2011), the linguistic situation is different – while English is the official tongue of the state as a natural continuation of the former colonial regime, there is also an indigenous language in each of the countries which performs the function of a national language, this being Chichewa in Malawi, as one of 12 other local tongues, and Setswana in Botswana, one of more than twenty indigenous tongues there. Although especially in Botswana the national language, as the native language of ca. 80% of the population, enjoys a rather strong position, which leads to the policy of assimilation of other minorities to it (cf. Nyati-Ramahobo 2004), it is unquestionable that both in Malawi and Botswana it is English that has attained the highest prestige and is the dominant tongue of the educated elites of the state (cf. Frydman 2011). Finally, the southern neighbour of Namibia and its former hegemon, the Republic of South Africa, shows a still different policy as regards the language situation in the state. Contrary to the aforementioned countries, the Republic of South Africa officially promotes the policy of multilingualism, having 11 official tongues (see above), out of the 25 used in the state, and this number includes English as a language of the former colonial rulers. However, as Kamwangamalu (2004) observes, despite the favourable state policy it is English in actual fact that enjoys a preferential treatment in public and administrative

domains of the country over other tongues. Against this background it then appears interesting to see that Namibia follows a rather unique path, especially when juxtaposed to the Republic of South Africa, in its having adopted a monolingual language policy, and to that a language which does not stem from its colonial past. As already mentioned above (cf. Frydman 2011: 182), such a decision was made even before Namibia became an independent state – it was a decision taken by SWAPO (South-West African People's Organisation) as a reaction to the policy of apartheid and their South-African oppressors, and thus against Afrikaans as their language. English was thus perceived as a symbol of liberation from the former policy of oppression (Pütz 1995ab; Frydman 2011).

As the above overview demonstrates, the linguistic situation in Namibia as regards its official language and language policy is rather uncommon, and, as mentioned earlier, it has become a subject of numerous analyses and discussions (cf. Cluver 1993; Harlech-Jones 1998; Marsh, Ontero, Shikongo 2002; Pütz 2000; Stell 2009, 2014; Töttemeyer 2010; Frydman 2011). Educationists and linguists point out that attaining positive results in education in a situation in which students have been taught in a language that is foreign to them is not possible, and even the past 90 years of compulsory English education have not managed to make Namibians English speakers (cf. Töttemeyer 2010). Some scholars point out that the policy of severing ties with South Africa, also in terms of the language, that developed during the apartheid regime, is not valid any more, as the Republic of South Africa is no longer a threat to Namibia. Therefore favouring monolingualism in English and ignoring local tongues not only does not contribute to positive results attained in education, but it also benefits only the privileged minority in the country (cf. Pütz 1995a; Harlech-Jones 1998). In summary, the discussion concerning the use of English in Namibia oscillates rather round the language policy in the country and the poor results in education, there appears to be no comprehensive analysis, however, which deals with the description of the English language and its use in Namibia (cf. Stell 2014), possibly due to its fairly recent history and little time for its having developed unique features of Namibian English. Only very recently has there been an attempt to provide an initial tentative description of the variety by Buschfeld and Kautzch (2014) as well as analyze English in Namibia according to Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model (Buschfeld 2014). Few books make any reference to English in Namibia when analyzing world Englishes. The *Ethnologue* does not list it as a separate variety. Mesthrie and Bhatt (2008) do not refer to it at all, and neither do Kachru et al. (2006). Other authors, e.g. Trudgill and Hannah (2008: 34–36), Melchers and Shaw (2011: 159) include it in the overview of African Englishes, they, however, do not devote any space to its description, except for stating that varieties of English in Southern Africa generally share features of pronunciation and grammar. Stell (2014) discusses the use of English in Namibia not from the point of view of its actual features, but rather its use in the context of inter- and intra-ethnic communication in Namibia, particularly in terms of the process of code-switching with the major indigenous tongues used locally. In view of the above neither is the present paper an attempt to offer such a description, for the lack of a comprehensive enough source of data and

context for comparison. Its objective is rather to offer some observations regarding the linguistic landscape of the use of English in Namibia illustrated by a selection of everyday uses of English in different contexts and functions, and unlike other analyses undertaken so far, to do so in reference to a written material. On the basis of the collected samples of texts the paper also undertakes to sketch possible differences of use found between English in Namibia and Standard British English, which is still the norm followed in that country.

At this point a comment needs to be made regarding the terminology used in the current analysis as well as, in the light of the above extensive discussion, the position of English in Namibia as seen against the overall selection of varieties of English identified at present worldwide. When classifying different varieties of English, side by side with the already classical division of Englishes into the Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles quoted above (cf. Kachru 1985, 1992) another traditional classification of varieties of English that Kachru's model is based on into English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) can often be found. Both of these, however, have been subject to criticism, mainly due to the fact that they categorize the variety of English in a given society in too broad terms, e.g. they ignore the fact that in the same community some speakers may use English as their first and others as second language (cf. Jenkins 2009), or that at times it is difficult to assign a given country unequivocally to only one of the above categories (cf. Buschfeld 2014). A more recent approach to investigating and differentiating between varieties of English in the post-colonial world based on the diachronic analysis of their development in a given area, the Dynamic Model, has been advocated by Schneider (2007, 2011). Following the assumption that the historical and political developments in a society lead to the re-writing of the users' sense of identity, which in turn re-defines the sociolinguistic conditions in a given society, and these finally are reflected in the subsequent linguistic developments in the tongues of both the colonizers and the colonized, the model postulates the existence of five stages of the English language evolution. These are, respectively, Foundation, Exonormative Stabilization, Nativization, Endonormative Stabilization, and finally Differentiation (Schneider 2007). Following these, each new English variety can thus be assigned to a given phase it is currently going through. Useful and widely acclaimed as the model is, in principle it appears unsuitable to be applied in the Namibian context for the obvious reason that English in Namibia has never been a post-colonial variety (cf. Buschfeld 2014). Buschfeld and Kautzsch (2014), however, do attempt to adopt the model also for the description of non-post-colonial Englishes and argue that, based on the initial investigation of its structures, English in Namibia is currently moving from stage 2 (Exonormative Stabilization) to stage 3 (Nativization), the situation possibly being a result of the early influence of South African English on the English used in Namibia, and more likely of the adoption of English as the sole official language in the state on its gaining independence. In other words, when we apply the classical interpretation to the above situation, English in Namibia is gradually moving from the EFL to the ESL stage. However, Buschfeld (2014: 194) is very cautious about making claims concerning the phases

of the development of Namibian English, as “there is currently not enough (socio) linguistic data available for EiNa and diachronic material is missing altogether.” This evaluation of the current state will, in turn, have an implication for the approach assumed in the present study. Since the move from the exonormative (EFL) stage, i.e. where the norm is Standard British English (SBrE), to the nativized (ESL) stage has not been fully warranted and is still lacking a thorough description, the analysis of the collected samples will assume Standard British English as the norm, also for the sake of a clearer presentation of the examples. Due to this Namibian English structures which show some differences when compared to SBrE will be described as departures from the norm (cf. also Steigertahl’s terminology quoted in the next section), until a thorough and an in-depth description of the nativized morpho-syntactic features of the new variety has been compiled.¹

2. Namibian English grammar and spelling

The few sources that list features of South African English (SAE), which English in Namibia accordingly resembles, mention a few points concerning aspects of SAE grammar, these are, however, very few and far between. Both Trudgill and Hannah (2008: 35) and Melchers and Shaw (2011: 116–117) point out as typical the use of an invariant question tag, notably *is it?*, and the use of the non-negative *no* as a sentence initiator, e.g., “A: Isn’t your car ready yet? – B: No, it is” (Melchers, Shaw 2011: 117). Besides that, Trudgill and Hannah (2008: 35) and Baugh and Cable (2002: 322) indicate a set of verbs which require the use of objects in SBrE, but which are often omitted in SAE, e.g. *Have you got?*, *Did you put?*, *Can I come with?* as well as the utilization of complement structures consisting of an adjective + infinitive where in SBrE the structure of an adjective + *of* + participle is used, e.g. *it is capable to withstand heat*. Melchers and Shaw (2011: 117), on the other hand, add the use of *busy* as a reinforcement marker of the progressive aspect, e.g. *He was busy lying in bed*. Additionally, Baugh and Cable (2002: 322; cf. Tait 1996: 83) point to the use of unusual constructions of the *He threw me over the hedge with a rock* type. The most extensive list, referring in the first place to Black South African English, can be found in Kirkpatrick (2007: 110, based on de Klerk, Gough 2002: 362–363), and the features are mostly in line with the general characteristics describing New Englishes (cf. Mesthrie, Bhatt 2008; Jenkins 2009, 2014). Beside the above-mentioned characteristics, they cover, among others, the deletion of endings in verb forms, nouns in plural, and in genitive (alternately, uncountable nouns often appear with

¹ At this point I wish to thank one of the reviewers of the paper for his/her cautionary comments concerning expressions like “departure from the norm”, “misuse”, etc. in the description of this newly developing variety. It is hoped, however, that the above comments and references to the current state of knowledge will justify their use in the discussion of the analysed examples, without at the same time carrying critical overtones towards the quality of the language and an intention to question the development of a fully independent variety of Namibian English in the future.

the plural ending), a different form of phrasal verbs, lack or alternative use of articles, pronouns often not distinguished for gender and also used as copy pronouns, a freer word order as well as the maintenance of the interrogative word order in indirect questions, etc. As can be seen, the above list is quite generic as regards the grammar of non-native English, while the inventory of variety-specific features is not extensive. At this point it is therefore worth adding a brief enumeration of morphosyntactic features found specifically in the English language in Namibia which were listed by Steigertahl in her Power Point presentation (delivered at the conference devoted to World Englishes in 2015),² namely: omission of subject pronouns (e.g. *is interesting*), overuse of plural markers with definite plural nouns (e.g. *good mornings*), a variant use of articles, already adduced above, overuse of the 3rd person singular markers (e.g. *you was here*), omission of the 3rd person singular marker (e.g. *this child do not eat at all*), double past tense markings (e.g. *Did he worked yesterday?*), underrepresentation of past tense (e.g. *Yesterday I play*), misuse of past tense (e.g. *I have come in 1995*), overuse of progressive forms (e.g. *I am having a book*), omission of auxiliary verbs (e.g. *they been here the longest*), some divergent use of adverbs (e.g. *for me personal*), as well as a number of other more specific examples of variant uses of structures.

However, all of the above as well as some of the aforementioned features of grammar have been detected only in the spoken interaction, which means we may have difficulties finding any confirmation of their existence in the written samples of Namibian English, and we must also bear it in mind that English in Namibia does not have to mirror South African English in all the aspects pointed to earlier. Therefore, the analytical section (to be found in Part 2 of the paper)³ aims at a more detailed analysis of a number of actual samples of Namibian English texts for the sake of establishing whether any of the above features can be identified in the randomly chosen written material too and whether any previously unmentioned aspects of the use of English can be identified here as well.

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² The presentation available at http://www.academia.edu/12861565/Presentation_English_in_Namibia_A_New_Variety.

³ The division of the paper into two parts is a result of the limitation set on the length of papers externally imposed on the journal editors.

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