

# Chapter 1

## Contact settings involving Germanic languages

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In this chapter, we outline the scope and the main aims of this volume. First, we briefly sketch the diversity of contact settings involving German(ic) varieties and the according research history. This sets the scene for a brief overview of the contributions included in this book.

### 1 Germanic varieties in language contact: Scenarios and research traditions

It is well-known that contact between speakers of different languages or varieties leads to various kinds of dynamics. From a grammatical perspective, especially contact between closely related languages/varieties fosters contact-induced innovations (as put forward by, e.g., Thomason 2014). The evaluation of such innovations reveals speakers' attitudes and is in turn an important aspect of the sociolinguistic dynamics linked to language contact.

In this volume, we have assembled studies on such settings where typologically similar languages are in contact, namely, language contact within the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. Languages involved include Afrikaans, Danish, English, Frisian, (Low and High) German, and Yiddish. The main focus is on constellations where a variety of German is involved.<sup>1</sup> These

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<sup>1</sup>This is why we use the term *German(ic)* in this book: We do not want to constrain ourselves to scenarios involving a German variety, but at the same time we do not want to pretend that we have assembled studies on Germanic contact varieties in a balanced way. There are no further implications of this term.



scenarios are multifaceted. Apart from some basic commonalities (such as the language(s) involved) these constellations differ in many respects. For example, there are settings where language contact results from emigration from Europe, e.g. to Africa (see, e.g., Wiese et al. 2017), to the Americas (see, e.g., Johannessen & Salmons 2015), to Australia (see, e.g., Riehl 2015), or to Melanesia (see, e.g., Maitz et al. in preparation). These settings can again be differentiated with regard to the extent and the role that colonialism played in the migration process. For example, the German-speaking minority in Namibia has its roots in the deliberate colonisation of southwestern Africa by the German government, resulting in the colony *Deutsch-Südwestafrika*. In contrast, other migration movements (such as the ones to North America) cannot be described as the result of concrete colonialist efforts (in the narrow sense), but are part of the more general colonial expansion of Europeans. Apart from that, language contact, of course, also results from immigration to Europe (see, e.g., Wiese 2013). In addition, in many cases no (recent) migration is involved; here two or more varieties are often in long-term contact (see, e.g., Höder 2021 [this volume]).

So far, studies on language contact involving German have often been separated according to the different migration scenarios at hand, which has resulted in somewhat different research traditions. For example, the so-called *Sprachinselersforschung* ('research on language islands') has mainly been concerned with settings caused by emigration from the contiguous German-speaking area in Central Europe to locations in Central and Eastern Europe and overseas, thus resulting in different varieties of German abroad. However, from a linguistic point of view, it does not seem to be necessary to distinguish categorically between contact scenarios within and outside of Central Europe if one thoroughly considers the impact of sociolinguistic circumstances, including the ecology of the languages involved (such as, for instance, German being the majority language and the monolingual habitus in Germany, but there existing completely different constellations elsewhere; see Haugen 1972 for the concept of language ecology).

In this volume, we focus on language contact as such, not on specific migration scenarios. Hence, we have assembled studies on language contact both within and outside of Germany. For instance, Rucker (2021 [this volume]) studies heritage language use in the United States, whilst Höder (2021 [this volume]) and Gregersen & Langer (2021 [this volume]) focus on language contact in Northern Germany (and Denmark). Recent studies have revealed striking similarities between different varieties of German irrespective of their differing sociohistorical backgrounds and respective contact languages (see, e.g., Wiese et al. 2014).<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>2</sup>See also Rosenberg (2003) for some revealing insights from "comparative speech island research".

supports the idea that the crucial aspect is language contact as such and that grammatical and sociolinguistic dynamics are comparable across contact scenarios in different parts of the world.

German(ic) contact varieties differ not only in their geographical locations and their sociohistorical backgrounds but also with regard to their vitality. On the one hand, there are instances of a complete language shift. For example, Low German in Iowa is no longer transferred as a heritage language (see, e.g., Rocker 2021 [this volume]), and there are many other communities in that part of the world where a language shift from different Germanic languages to English is imminent (see, e.g., Page & Putnam 2015). On the other hand, there are also examples of persistent language maintenance in North America (see, e.g., Louden 2016 on Pennsylvania Dutch) and elsewhere (see, e.g., Shah & Zappen-Thomson 2018 and Rosenberg 2018 on German in Namibia and in Latin America, respectively). This is often (but not always) linked to religious affiliations that support separation from other surrounding groups. And finally, there are of course many intermediate cases (see, e.g., Gregersen & Langer 2021 [this volume] on efforts in Frisia to prevent language shift). The vitality of German(ic) varieties as spoken by minorities is closely linked to the institutional support from which these varieties benefit. This has a strong impact on where and when a language is used. Questions that are highly relevant to language maintenance and shift include: Is the minority language used only in private homes? Is there a written form of the language in use? Are there (still) newspapers texts, radio or TV programmes, religious services, school lessons, or social media contents in the minority language? A reduction of domains can precede language shift, but this does not necessarily have to be the case. Also in this respect, the varieties at hand differ significantly. For example, German-language newspapers in North America were typically discontinued, or they switched to English during the 20th century (see Rocker 2021 [this volume]), whilst the Namibian German-language newspaper *Allgemeine Zeitung* is still in daily print (see, e.g., Shah & Zappen-Thomson 2018).

Another important aspect is of course the combination of the languages and varieties interacting with each other. A Germanic language can be in contact with another Germanic language (e.g. Yiddish in contact with American English in the United States; see, e.g., Nove 2021 [this volume]), with a more distantly related language (i.e. other Indo-European languages, such as German in contact with Brazilian Portuguese in Brazil, see, e.g., Rosenberg 2003), or with an unrelated language (e.g. German in contact with Hungarian in Hungary, see Knipf-Komlósi 2008). Although we focus on the first type of setting in this volume, there is still

a great variety of constellations to be examined. For example, these constellations differ in the number of languages involved. Many scenarios involve more than two major contact languages/varieties. This holds true especially (but not only) if we also consider non-standard varieties.<sup>3</sup> In the Danish-German contact zone, for example, Standard Danish, Jutlandic Standard Danish, South Jutlandic, Standard German, North High German, and Low German interact with one another (among other varieties, see Höder 2021 [this volume]).<sup>4</sup> Also in Namibia and South Africa, German, Afrikaans, and English (among other languages) are in close contact. In such cases, we are dealing with contact of several closely related varieties (see, e.g., Zimmer 2019).

The diversity of the different scenarios outlined above allows us to study many different aspects of the dynamics induced by language contact. With this volume, we hope to exploit this potential in order to shed some new light on the interplay of language contact, variation, change, and the concomitant sociolinguistic dynamics. Particularly, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of closely related varieties in contact.

By doing so, we also aim to deepen research on German(ic) in language contact from a decidedly contact-linguistic perspective. There is a long-standing tradition of research on Germanic in different contact settings. As mentioned above, the German *Sprachinseln* ('language islands') in particular have been the focus of attention for a long time, beginning already in the 19th century (see Rosenberg 2005 for an overview). However, research on these varieties has mostly been carried out in the context of descriptive dialectology, more specifically as *Sprachinselforschung*, with a goal to investigate the preservation of inherited features. There was no genuine interest in language contact:

In German dialectology, language islands were predominantly investigated as relics of the past for the purpose of studies in language change. Most of the linguistic communities examined were rather small with restricted external communication. Since these conservative communities frequently preserved archaic features of German, they were seen as offering access to linguistic elements which had died out in the main German language area. [...] The interest in language islands was built on a myth of purity and homogeneity. Language variation and language contact were considered more as a source of data corruption than as a subject of research. (Rosenberg 2005: 222–223)

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<sup>3</sup>See, e.g., Schirmunski (1930), Trudgill (1986), and Rosenberg (2005) for studies on the dynamics induced by dialect contact.

<sup>4</sup>Assuming that such varieties can be neatly distinguished.

Subsequently, interest in language contact phenomena has increased in the field. However, the original *Sprachinsel* approach continued to have an effect. It is only recently that a re-orientation of the field can be observed, which was (at least partly) initiated through the programmatic article by Mattheier (1994). By now, discussions have broadened in scope by taking into account the concepts and methods that have been developed in the international literature on language contact and language variation (see, e.g., Putnam 2011, Page & Putnam 2015, and Boas & Höder 2018). It is our aim to further this line of research. In this volume, we have assembled studies that:

- view language contact from a grammar-theoretical perspective (see the contribution by Steffen Höder),
- focus on lesser-studied contact settings (e.g. German in Namibia; see the contributions by Yannic Bracke, Henning Radke, and Britta Stuhl & Christian Zimmer)
- make use of new corpus-linguistic resources (see the contributions by Yannic Bracke and Britta Stuhl & Christian Zimmer) or newly acquired data (see the contribution by Maike H. Rocker)
- analyse data quantitatively (see, e.g., the contribution by Chaya R. Nove)
- study language contact phenomena in computer-mediated communication (see the contributions by Johanna Gregersen & Nils Langer and Henning Radke)
- focus on the interplay of language use and language attitudes or ideologies (see, e.g., the contributions by Yannic Bracke and Johanna Gregersen & Nils Langer)

In the following section, we briefly outline the contributions of this volume.

## 2 The papers in this volume

The volume at hand is mainly based on a selection of papers that were originally presented at the workshop *German(ic) in language contact: Grammatical and sociolinguistic dynamics*, which was held at Freie Universität Berlin (3–5 July 2019).<sup>5</sup> The topics covered range from phonetics, morphology, and syntax to the

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<sup>5</sup>This workshop was organised by the members of the DFG-funded research project *Namdeutsch: The dynamics of German in the multilingual context of Namibia* (PIs: Horst Simon, Freie Universität Berlin, and Heike Wiese, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin).

use and perception of transferred lexical and grammatical material and issues related to language shift and maintenance. The volume brings together authors who share a general interest in language contact phenomena but work in different frameworks, including scholars who are concerned with corpus linguistics, sociolinguistics, theoretical approaches to multilingualism, etc.

The book consists of two major sections. The first section focuses on grammatical aspects of language contact (including phonetics), whilst the contributions in the second section are mainly concerned with sociolinguistic dynamics. The first section starts with a contribution by Steffen Höder, who examines morphosyntactic arealisms in the Danish-German contact zone, i.e. features shared by a number of German and Danish varieties that have been shaped by consistent language contact. These features are addressed within the framework of Diasystematic Construction Grammar (DCxG). A core assumption of this approach is the idea that language-specificity is part of a construction's pragmatic meaning and that constructicons comprise both language-specific and language-*un*specific constructions (i.e. *idioconstructions* and *diaconstructions*). Höder claims that the proportion of diaconstructions in a multilingual constructicon increases constantly. The pertinent mechanisms are demonstrated with the help of selected arealisms, such as the *SHALL* future.

The following two contributions are both concerned with phonetic phenomena in contact settings. The paper by Chaya R. Nove focuses on phonetic change within the community of Hasidic Yiddish speakers in New York, using the apparent time approach. To this extent, the phonetic systems of three different generations of Hasidic Yiddish-English bilinguals are compared (more specifically, the vowels /i, ɪ, u, ʊ, a/). It is shown that convergence can be observed in the younger generations to a greater extent. This main result is interpreted with reference to models of second language acquisition, with a special focus on the impact of the linguistic input.

The contribution by Britta Stuhl & Christian Zimmer is the first of three papers in this volume studying the contact setting of German in Namibia. This setting involves contact not only of closely related and (to a much lesser extent) unrelated languages (such as Afrikaans, English, German, Khoekhoegowab, and Oshiwambo), but also of dialects of German. Britta Stuhl & Christian Zimmer focus on the latter aspect. Their contribution centres around the question of the extent to which features of Northern German varieties (which were used by a significant proportion of the German-speaking immigrants) have survived dialect levelling. The corpus study reveals that Namibian German does indeed contain specifically Northern German phonetic features; the fact that one of these features is more frequently used by older speakers hints at an ongoing change.

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Yannic Bracke also examines language use within the Namibian German community, but he focuses on sociolinguistic aspects. He is concerned with the question of how the gender of speakers correlates with the use of transferred lexical items. The underlying assumption is that the use of loan words (which are usually considered to be characteristic of non-standard language use) could be connected to a male stereotype. This idea is based on statements by community members. However, his corpus study (which comprises the elaboration of a sophisticated annotation system for transferred lexical items) shows that there is no consistent correlation of gender and language use in this respect.

Henning Radke studies the use of informal Namibian German (*Namdeutsch*) in computer-mediated communication. Most of the speakers he studies were born and raised in Namibia but currently live in Germany. Within this diasporic group, *Namdeutsch* serves as an in-group marker. Transferred lexical material (from Afrikaans and English) plays a crucial role here. Radke compares language use in two types of online communities: single mode groups, which communicate only online, and mixed mode groups, which additionally meet face-to-face. Based on this comparison, he examines the interplay of communication mode, (multilingual) language use, and group cohesion.

Whilst transferred lexical material has generally positive connotations within the Namibian German diaspora, the group examined by Johanna Gregersen & Nils Langer partially rejects such outcomes of language contact. In their study, Gregersen & Langer focus on the assessment of borrowings by academic linguists working on North Frisian. Using examples from different types of scholarly and public discourse, they show that some of these scholars do not only describe but also evaluate language use. These evaluations can be seen in the context of linguistic purism: external influences on North Frisian are evaluated as a threat to the language. Such assessments are rather unusual in the context of academic linguistics. Gregersen & Langer consider this to be specific to discourses on smaller languages.

The paper by Maike H. Rocker is the last contribution in this volume. It deals with heritage language use in print media, more specifically with Low German and High German correspondence letters to the *Ostfriesen-Zeitung*, an East Frisian-American newspaper, which was published in the United States until 1971. She answers the following classic question: *Who writes what to whom in which language?* The results provide insights into a number of sociolinguistic aspects, such as the regional distribution of East Frisian communities in the United States, the domains of Low German and High German language use, and the interrelation of pragmatic purpose and language choice. Finally, Rocker shows how the

newspaper fostered a sense of East Frisian-American identity, which in turn facilitated language maintenance of both Low German and High German well into the 20th century.

In sum, the papers collected in this volume reflect a wide array of current work in the thriving and fast-developing field of language contact studies with regard to German(ic). It is to be hoped that they give an idea of the range of insights that can be gained by applying methods and theories of contemporary language contact studies to a traditional sub-field of German(ic) linguistics.

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