A Case Study of Code-Switching in Multilingual Namibian Keyboard-to-Screen Communication

Journal Article

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Despite its multilingual setting, Namibia's sociolinguistic situation has attracted little attention by researchers at this point. While English has been the sole official language for over 20 years, at least 10 other languages can be encountered in the southern African country, whereas English is seldom acquired as L1.

Keyboard-to-screen communication (KSC), i.e. messaging services such as SMS and WhatsApp, is omnipresent in our current daily lives. As the medium frequently exhibits elements of spoken language, the language used on WhatsApp can be an interesting source for phenomena that often occur in oral language use.

This case study aims at shedding light on the sociolinguistic situation of Namibia by analyzing occurrences of codeswitching within KSC of Namibians. Findings include the preference of English over the L1 during casual conversation with discourse-related code-switching to the L1 for emotional or urgent matters. Additionally, code-switching appears to be a non-marked feature of KSC in Namibia.

Student Paper

1. Introduction

The Republic of Namibia in southern Africa cannot only be characterized by its cultural diversity and multi-ethnicity, the population's *de facto* multilingualism seems ubiquitous (cf., e.g., Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 122-123; Kautzsch & Schröder forthc.: 1). Interestingly, the country has maintained a monolingual language policy – with English as the sole official language – ever since its independence in 1990 (cf. Frydman 2011; Wallace 2011: 309). This mostly ideologically-based decision, however, does not reflect the linguistic daily life of Namibians, neither in the past nor currently. Also, the consequences of this monolingual language policy on sectors like education have attracted the attention of researchers more recently to investigate, among other aspects, language use and attitudes (cf., e.g., Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Kautzsch & Schröder fc.), language contact phenomena (cf., e.g., Kamati 2011; Stell 2014a; Simasiku et al. 2015), and potential nativization effects on the English spoken in Namibia (cf., e.g., Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Schneider & Schröder 2015; Kautzsch & Schröder fc.).

In a linguistically diverse setting like Namibia, it is not surprising that code-switching constitutes a widespread practice among the population and is not limited to face-to-face communication – especially in the light of devices like smart phones and other new technologies versus the related new forms of communication, which have emerged only in recent times and have spread so fast around the globe that (linguistic) research only hardly keeps pace with it (cf. Brock & Schildhauer fc.; Dürscheid & Frick 2014). Keyboard-to-screen communication – either in the form of text messaging or, more recently, represented by the smart phone application *WhatsApp* – is a popular means of communication, also in Namibia.

This case study aims at catching a glimpse of Namibia's insufficiently-researched current sociolinguistic situation by analyzing multilingual *WhatsApp* messages provided by Namibian informants. Also, research on the digital medium *WhatsApp* still is at an early stage and observations could shed light on typical features of *WhatsApp* communication. For this, the linguistic situation of Namibia will be briefly outlined in the next section, followed by a summary of the current state of research on Keyboard-to-screen communication – with a focus on

WhatsApp. Then, the multilingual Namibian *WhatsApp* messages and, subsequently, the analysis will be provided and discussed. A concluding section will summarize the findings.

## 2.	Namibia

### 2.1	History of Namibia

Namibia's history can be divided into several eras defined by distinct periods of language contact that have shaped the country's current cultural and linguistic landscape.

Before colonization, the area of present-day Namibia was home to several groups of indigenous Khoisan peoples – the Nama, the Damara, and the San – who were joined by different Bantu-speaking settlers – the Herero, the Ovambo, and the Kavango – in the seventeenth century (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 124-125). In the following centuries, ethnically mixed groups immigrated to the territory: the first group consisted of Oorlams from Cape Colony who migrated towards South-West Africa in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Around 1870, a second group came from South Africa to settle down in the Rehoboth territory, coming to be known as the Rehoboth Basters (cf. ibd.). Also, European missionaries found their way to the area during the nineteenth century (cf. Wallace 2011: 54-56). This pre-colonialization contact zone would not only connect the speakers of the Bantu and the Khoisan languages, respectively, but also introduced Indo-European languages to the country.

Not even fifteen years later, Germany colonized South-West Africa until World War I. The German rule of German South-West Africa was not a peaceful period but served as a major phase of language contact between the Germans and the South-West Africans as German was an official language of the period (cf. Frydman 2011: 182) – and remnants of that period can still be found in present-day Namibia, especially when looking at Namibian place names, for example *Lüderitz* or *Mariental*.

After the era of German South-West African had ended in 1915, the country became a League of Nations mandate governed by South Africa (cf. Wallace 2011: 205). German lost its status as an official language and was replaced by both Afrikaans and English – with the latter never reaching the status of a *de facto* official language (cf. Frydman 2011: 182). During the South African administration period, which lasted until independence in 1990, the oppressive apartheid system was employed by the South African National Party in the middle of the twentieth century. Soon, resistance against the South African oppressors emerged in form of the South West African People's Organisation, SWAPO in short, and – literally – fought for Namibian independence, which was ultimately gained in 1990 (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 126-127; Wallace 2011: 309). The drafted constitution includes, among several other important changes, a monolingual language policy that lists English as the sole official language of the Republic of Namibia as "Namibia's liberation movement […] deemed it necessary to replace Afrikaans, the 'language of the oppressors,' and to establish a language policy in preparation for an independent Namibia" (Frydman 2011: 182).

### 2.2	Sociolinguistic Situation in Present-Day Namibia

Today, the status of English as the sole official language is not reflected in the diverse population, which is mostly multilingual (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 127).

Despite being labeled as the 'language of the oppressors', Afrikaans is commonly encountered in Namibia – and, to a lesser extent, even German is still spoken. However, English has gradually spread among the Namibians since independence: media such as television, radio, and news-papers are available in the English language and also international programs are broad-cast (cf., e.g., Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2016: 5-6; Ejikeme 2011: 69-70). Also, the English language has gained ground among the population and is regarded as a prestigious language (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 141-143, 147-148).

However, the mainly ideologically-based monolingual language policy is viewed controversially by parts of the Namibian population (cf. Frydman 2011). Even today, English is usually not acquired as a native language but rather learned in schools as a second language, where it eventually becomes the primary medium of instruction from Grade 4 or even Grade 1 onwards (cf. Kamati 2011: 1; Stell 2014b: 227). Unfortunately, though, in reality, this does not seem to correlate with the actual language proficiency of either the teachers or the students (cf., e.g., Kamati 2011; Kisting 2011, 2012; Simasiku et al. 2015: 8). It has been

found that, in classrooms, code-switching is often employed to facilitate understanding and to overcome a language barrier that is clearly present (cf. Kamati 2011; Simasiku et al. 2015).

Stell (2014a: 98, 102-105) has discovered that English only functions as a means of interethnic communication for non-whites – most notably the native Bantu-language speakers, whereas Afrikaans remains a more general lingua franca within groups also including Coloureds and Whites[1]. In Namibia, Afrikaans still is the native tongue of several ethnic groups (including Coloureds and Rehoboth Basters) and a second language of various other groups (e.g., Namas, Damaras, Hereros) who grew up with a Bantu or Khoisan language themselves. Thus, as groups show conver-

gence towards Afrikaans rather than English, it seems that Afrikaans does not possess the connotations of an 'oppressor language' in present-day Namibia.

However, more recently, researchers have found potential signs of nativization of English within the speech of Namibians (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Kautzsch & Schröder fc.; Schneider & Schröder 2015): This includes potential mergers and splits on the phonological level, elements in the lexicon, morphosyntactical constructions, and also pragmatic features that are either closely related to other South African varieties of English or might even constitute unique features of a Namibian variety of English – future research will shed more light on this. Namibians themselves call their variety of English *Namlish* (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014: 27), which indicates a certain linguistic awareness regarding the English spoken in Namibia. In any case, all of this inevitably implies that English has gained much ground in Namibia during the last twenty years and is indeed present in the linguistic everyday life of Namibians.

That being said, language practice in Namibia has not been thoroughly documented and researched yet. The present work aims at doing exactly that and

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[1] The Bantu-speaking groups in Stell's (2014a) study were represented by Ovambos and Hereros. Especially Ovambos would primarily make use of the English language – in intra- and interethnic communication. Whether this is linguistically or politically/ideologically motivated seems to be an interesting question – the Ovambos in Stell's study stated not to be proficient in Afrikaans, which could have geographical reasons (a possible consequence of the apartheid regime) or a statement to advocate and support the SWAPO's language policy. This is, however, speculation and would need to be addressed in further research.

presents a piece of the country's linguistic puzzle with a focus on the use of code-switching practices within keyboard-to-screen communication. A brief excursion to the current state of research in the area of keyboard-to-screen communication seems necessary to put these findings into context.

3. Keyboard-to-Screen Communication

During the previous 20 years, mobile phones and, more recently, smart phones have become a constant companion in our every-day lives. With the devices, new forms of communication have also become ubiquitous, like the frequently-used short messaging service (SMS) or, with the rise of smart phones, the instant-messaging application *WhatsApp* – the latter having already overtaken the use of SMS in terms of the number of messages sent per day and year (cf., e.g., Fischer 2015; Sparkes 2015). Also, *WhatsApp* has only very recently reached more than 1 billion users worldwide (cf. Statt 2016).

While *WhatsApp* is widely used, researchers have only started to study the medium, also within the field of linguistics (cf.

Dürscheid & Frick 2014: 150; Hinz 2015). Jucker & Dürscheid (2012) as well as Dürscheid & Frick (2014: 161-177) have described *WhatsApp* and directly compared it to SMS, while also establishing the term *keyboard-to-screen communication*.[2] Main differences between both forms of communication include the different types of underlying constraints and multimedia capabilities: SMS operate on a space constraint while *WhatsApp* seems to be constrained by time – i.e. in SMS communication, messages are billed in 160 character intervals,[3] whereas *WhatsApp* is, as of 2016, a free service that even allows up to 4,000 characters per single message. However, *WhatsApp* represents a potentially more synchronous form of communication than SMS and resembles instant messaging software on a computer that displays whether a contact is online or typing a

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2   The introduction of the term keyboard-to-screen communication seemed necessary to distinguish communication forms using phones from other forms of digital communication that are typically addressed with computer-mediated communication, even though, of course, smart phones are technically computers. For further information, see Jucker & Dürscheid (2012) and Dürscheid & Frick (2014).

3   Today, SMS flatrates have made this constraint rather obsolete, however.

message. This, according to Dürscheid & Frick (2014), potentially causes real-time response pressure, which subsequently leads to a higher number of misspellings despite the more sophisticated virtual keyboard of a smart phone as compared to the numerical keyboard of older mobile phones. This also leads to a fundamental difference in the communication: In SMS, typically, single communicative acts are conveyed whereas *WhatsApp* communication involves a higher degree of dialogicity due to the presence of communicative act sequences (cf. ibid.: 172). In other words, similar to oral conversation, a whole string of related utterances is produced during *WhatsApp* communication rather than SMS communication. Further, *WhatsApp* not only allows group chats with up to 50 people but also enables users to enrich their messages in various ways without any additional costs: From pictograms – usually referred to as *emojis* – to photos and videos to voice recordings, *WhatsApp* users are able to overcome the spatial distance between them and their contacts and share their experiences (cf. Arens 2014: 87-101; König & Bahlo 2014: 8-9) almost effortlessly – whereas SMS users only have very limited, rather complicated and expensive options in

this regard. This, bundled with the general oraliteracy found in keyboard-to-screen communication, allows for much more expressive and emotional communication (cf. Arens 2014: 101), the implications of which still needs to be better understood via more research.

Within the field of keyboard-to-screen communication, linguistic studies addressing code-switching can mostly be found for SMS communication: Researchers worldwide have already compiled big corpora of linguistic keyboard-to-screen communication data (cf., e.g., *sms4science*) with various research goals. For *WhatsApp* communication, however, only small case studies seem to exist and focus on writtenness of dialects or group identities, respectively (cf., e.g., Hernández 2015; Weber & Schürmann 2014). Linguistic studies investigating keyboard-to-screen communication in southern African countries are unknown to the author.

4. Data & Methodology

4.1 Data Collection & Informants

The data investigated here consists of a corpus of 173 turns of sequential *WhatsApp* messages from five separate conversations between the same two informants amounting to roughly 850 words.[4] The informants are sisters and native Namibians with German-speaking parents who were contacted via email and asked whether they would like to contribute to a research project by providing the researcher with screenshots of *WhatsApp* conversations of their own choosing that, at some point, contain more than one language.[5] The data has been transcribed and anonymized. Additionally, informant A has agreed on answering questions regarding both informants' linguistic background and specific aspects of the *WhatsApp* conversations.

Informant A, whose messages in the following examples will be displayed on the

left side, is a 25-year old teacher, while her younger sister informant B is a 21-year old medical student. Their native language is German and both informants have been exposed to English and Afrikaans from an early age on due to their multilingual environment – formal language education, however, started from Grade 1 for English and from Grade 5 or 6 for Afrikaans. While informant A uses German, English, and Afrikaans on a daily basis, informant B apparently does not use Afrikaans as frequently.

The informants did not make use of any kind of autocorrect function during their conversations, as is also evident from the amount of misspellings within the excerpts.

4.2 Framework for Analysis

There are numerous approaches to code-switching, especially distinguishing the formal and the functional perspective on code-switching. For the purpose of this case study, the formal grammatical aspects of code-switching will not be the primary focus. The social aspect of code-switching will be the focal point of this work, even though it constitutes a rather complex matter that can be fuzzy at times (cf. Stell & Yakpo 2015: 4).

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4 While the corpus and number of speakers is fairly small, it is still appropriate for a qualitative pilot study, which will be followed up by a larger investigation.

5 I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Anne Schröder for making this exchange possible in the first place.

Thus, the analysis of the *WhatsApp* conversation data follows a socio-functional conversational analysis approach, which assumes that conversational code-switching constitutes a deliberate and functional choice of a speaker who takes into account linguistic and cultural backgrounds of addressees (cf. Auer 2009; Gumperz 1982; Myers-Scotton 2009: 476; Weber & Schürmann 2014: 196). Distinctions are made between *insertional* and *alternational* forms of code-switching and *discourse-* and *participant-related* switching – even though both informants know each other extraordinarily well and would, assumingly, not feel the necessity to enter negotiation sequences, which are the defining element of *participant-related* code-switching (cf. Auer 2009: 500). The analysis should aim at investigating the interactional component of code-switching without decontextualizing single occurrences of switching. For descriptive purposes, terminology of the formal Matrix Language Frame model by Myers-Scotton (cf., e.g., 2009: 484-485) will also be used.

Additionally, to get a first impression, the turns have been quantified according to languages and code-switching status, i.e.,

whether turns contain elements of more than one language or are monolingual.

5. Results

5.1 Overview

The languages that are used within the *WhatsApp* conversations between both informants are English, German, and Afrikaans. Occasionally, the languages are switched within the same turn. More common is, however, the alternation between turns. Several turns have been counted as *other* in this overview as they contained ambiguous content – examples for this are emojis, interjections or ambiguous words. *Ok*, for instance, appears frequently in several spelling variations like *ok*, *okay*, *oki* or *oku*, often constitutes a whole turn, and cannot clearly be attributed to one of the three occurring languages. Table 1 illustrates the distribution of languages that the individual informants use, while Table 2

shows the distribution of languages according to the turns both informants take. Generally, informant A is a little more active than informant B as informant A has sent 103 turns to B while informant B has only sent 70 turns to A. Informant A clearly prefers the English language during her *WhatsApp* messages – even when code-switching within turns, English always appears in the message. While informant B mostly uses English as well (to a lesser degree than her sister however), she frequently resorts to sending very short and, within this categorization, linguistically ambiguous messages (n = 21). Additionally, informant B hardly uses any Afrikaans – only two occurrences of intra-turn switching between English and Afrikaans can be found in the data. Compared to the use of English and German, informant A does not frequently compile messages in Afrikaans, either.

Table 1 Distribution of Languages According to Individual Informants (in Turns)

language / informant	EN	DE	AFRK	EN-DE	EN-AFRK	DE-AFRK	EN-DE-AFRK	other	total
A	63	11	1	11	5	0	2	10	103
B	31	15	0	0	2	1	0	21	70
total	94	26	1	11	7	1	2	31	173

Both informants clearly prefer the English language during *WhatsApp* conversations among each other (cf. Table 2): about 53% of all turns (n = 94) are monolingual and in English. Under 15% of all turns (n = 21) contain bi- or multilingual content. This, however, does not necessarily reflect the amount of code-switching within the data – the intra-turn switches, in most cases, represent intra-sentential and also inser-tional code-switching.[6] The instances of code-switching will be addressed more thoroughly in the next section.

Table 2

Distribution of Languages
According to Turns Taken by Both Informants

type of turn / conversation		#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	total
monolingual	English	32	33	17	4	8	94
	German	9	9	3	5	0	26
	Afrikaans	0	1	0	0	0	1
multilingual	English-German	6	4	1	0	0	11
	Afrikaans-English	1	2	0	2	2	7
	Afrikaans-German	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Afrikaans-English-German	2	0	0	0	0	2
other		11	9	6	2	3	31
total		61	58	28	13	13	173

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[6] This assumption is based on the findings of a corpus study by Schnitzer as presented in Dürscheid & Frick (2014: 169): the average amount of characters per *WhatsApp* message amounts to 34.4 characters (while the average message in SMS communication is 110 characters long). This would imply that a turn in *WhatsApp* communication rather represents phrases or short sentences and, thus, would contain forms of intra-sentential code-switching. Whether insertions represent the most frequent type of intra-sentential switching (in *WhatsApp* communication) and whether *WhatsApp* turns usually do not contain more than one sentence would have to be addressed by further research. For the data at hand, this appears to be the case, though.

5.2 Conversational Analysis

Within the data, different types of code-switching can be found. These include several forms of insertional and alternational code-switching. This section presents excerpts from the *WhatsApp* conversations between both informants and provides an analysis of the respective code-switching situation.

The first conversation, which is also the longest conversation overall with 61 turns, is thematically based on a formal dance with a masquerade ball theme, for which B needs an appropriate dress and accessories and, thus, asks A whether she could send her something via mail. The following examples show the frequent switching between mostly German and English, both in intra- and inter-turn contexts. As previously mentioned, informant A's messages will be displayed on the left side while informant B's messages are on the right side. Also, within the excerpts, the languages are coded as follows: German, **English**, Afrikaans, *Other*. Translations are provided by the author and are displayed in parentheses.

This first excerpt shows the starting point of the main part of the first conversation and is already very representative for the informants' behavior during the rest of the conversation – not only in terms of code-switching: Numerous misspellings can be found (e.g., *dide instead of *dude*, *Somewhee instead of *somewhere*, etc.), typical non-standard spellings and constructions are used (e.g., *wat instead of *what*, omission of determiner in *Hast du Abendkleid? – literally *Do you have evening gown?*), apostrophes in contractions are ignored, blank spaces at word boundaries are frequently omitted, and capitalization is almost exclusively found at the start of a sentence (esp. in speaker A's messages), which could be the result of an automation process that numerous modern (smart) phones possess. Interesting to note is also the spelling of the German determiner *ein*, or in this case *ei, which could either be a typing error or non-standard spelling that can be found in dialectal variation.

Focusing on the code-switching aspects of Example (1), several interesting passages should be closely examined. The sequence of turns starts with two turns by informant B: the first is an informal English greeting while the second states B's request in German. There is a clear turn boundary in this form of

communication – visualized through the timestamps next to the message content, which represent one complete and sent message – and both turns have been sent in rapid succession. As the first turn constitutes a salutation, one could argue for a case of emblematic insertional switching here, which would, then, suggest that B has embedded English elements into a German matrix. Also, taking the further context into

consideration, i.e. the following turns, this two-turn sequence would rather seem like discourse-related alternational CS: The very informal greeting to A is given in English, the actual matter of importance for B, then, is introduced in German instead, possibly for emphatic or organizational reasons. A then answers in English, which hints at the possibility that this whole excerpt does not signify a linguistic negotiation sequence but

Example (1)

		Hey dide	18:15
		Hast du Abendkleid?	18:15
		(Do you have an evening gown?)	
Nope	18:36		
		Okay. Cocktail? **The purple?**	18:36
Somewhee ja	18:36		
(yes)			
For *wat*	18:36		
		Samstag ist ei Ball	18:37
		(Saturday is a formal dance)	
	[…]		
Good thing i have a half day job 😄			
	22:13		
Atleast i can manage my own timein afternoon			
mostly. So thats good	22:13		
		Exactly 😄	22:15
		Hahaha	22:15
Gute night aufwiedersehen	22:16		
(**Good**night goodbye)			

rather presents a case of unmarked code-switching as both informants know each other well and communicate frequently. B's next turn is ambiguous: while the latter part of the answer is definitely English, the former two words (*Okay. Cocktail?* [as in *cocktail dress* or *Cocktailkleid*]) are found in German as well – both words are borrowings from English, though. It is clear that, within this turn, a switch to English is taking place; depending on the interpretation, however, the switch could be regarded as insertional or alternational. In any case, the next turns by A include the German insertion *ja* into A's rather stable English frame. From the whole sequence, it seems impossible to determine any pragmatic function of this switch, which, again, suggests an unmarked and possibly conversationally non-functional code-switching situation, i.e. code-mixing. The element *wat*, on that note, is another ambiguous element as it could be Afrikaans, a non-standard spelling of English *what*, or a non-standard spelling of the German *was* primarily found in low German dialects, which both signify the same concept, however. B replies in German and, thus, uses the same language with which the main point of the sequence has already been introduced. After a while passes, A messages

Example (2)

And mayne jewellery thatll fit?	16:04

<u>Ai</u>. **Dude ill check. But i dont hv much time today to look thru** alles   16:04
(<u>Ouch</u>.)   (everything)

Ok	16:09
No worries	16:09

I hv a dress from inga but it wont fit u
      16:09
Its so eng   16:09
   (tight)
But its an evening dress   16:09
Ill send my grad balldress   16:10
Thatll fit its stretchy   16:10

Ok	16:12
Thanks	16:12

[...]

Ok hab kleider mitgeschickt. Da ist auch eine cd
dabei die muss john bei dir abholen 19:54
(Ok, I have sent the dresses. There is also a CD
included that John has to pick up at your place)
Masken auch da   19:54
(Masks are also included)

Ok	19:55
♥♥♥	19:55

B to talk about the benefits of her part-time job in English to which B also replies in

English, which could be indicative of the emphatic function of German for informant

Example (3)

Bei dem **grad** kleid brauchtest du nur ohrringe
                                                    19:57
(For the **grad** dress, you would only need earrings)
Da passt <u>keene keyte</u> zum **maybe** ein armband
                                                    19:57
(<u>no necklace</u> fits this; **maybe** a bracelet)

                                        Awesome   19:57

B while English is the preferred choice for casual conversation. Informant A's last turn in Example (1) can be seen as another instance of code-mixing, which A seems to be using more frequently than B.

Example (2) shows an excerpt from the continuation of the same conversation, which takes place on the next day. The first turn of B in this example reflects her language choice for the whole day: Even though she is still asking A for accessories that fit to the dress for the formal dance, she does not use German anymore. A, however, employs more switching now. While she only inserts an interjection from Afrikaans and a German quantifier into the English frame of her first reply, she later exclusively compiles German messages. This alternation occurs after more than three hours have passed and different messages have apparently been sent in the meantime.[7] The alternational switch to German by A most likely functions as another case of discourse-related switching that organizes the conversation and, in this case, might draw the attention from another issue back to the topic of the dress. Even after this excerpt, A continues using a German frame for a number of turns until she starts using more lexical insertions from English and also Afrikaans (cf. Example (3)) before she switches to a monolingual English message again (cf. Example (4)). The frequent multilingual insertions, this time into the German frame, suggest that code-switching for both frames is an unmarked choice for speaker A.

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7 The informants have omitted this part from their conversations. Thus, it is not known to the author what happened in the *WhatsApp* conversation during that timeframe.

Example (4) also shows another interesting instance of switching: ***It passes an den körper an n takes*** […]. The message starts in English, contains a German verb phrase and then switches back to English. The verb, however, contains English inflection attached to the German verb stem; the argument of the verb phrase is also given in German. As the English frame can still be recognized, both the intra-word switch and the intra-sentential switch could be considered cases of insertional code-switching. On a functional level, speaker A possibly uses the linguistic common ground between her and her sister to overcome specific lexical gaps – the informants might feel more comfortable in their native tongue with parts of the word field *clothing* or A felt that the German concept expresses her thoughts more precisely, i.e., another case of unmarked code-mixing.

The second conversation between A and B does not focus on one particular issue unlike the previous one. The conversation consists of several sequences (58 turns) discussing different smaller topics, such as church, one sister visiting the other, one sister feeling sick, et cetera. Example (5) shows an excerpt from that conversation. There, A and B message each other regar-

ding a number of friends or family members who want to go to a local church. Whenever a friend's or family member's name is mentioned, the message is compiled in German, whereas most other parts of the conversation sent by A are, as usual, in English. The topic of friends and family could serve as a trigger to German – their native language, associated with said friends and family – as a form of discourse-related code-switching. The same can also be observed for the other conversations.

The last example (cf. Example (6)) is an excerpt taken from the same conversation. Even though it does not show any new features of the informants' code-switching behavior, the context makes this excerpt noteworthy: This part of the conversation occurs at night when both informants are about to go to sleep as they both are rather tired, which they do not only explicitly state in the sequence of messages but it is also suggested by the amount of typing errors that A produces. Despite the late hour and their tiredness, both informants – but especially A – alternate between two or three languages, respectively. A alternates from English to German to Afrikaans and back to English, while B initially sends one message in German and then switches to

Example (4)

Itll look nice on u	19:59
It passes an den körper **an n takes the rolls**	
away lol	20:00
(fits to the body)	

English. Even in a sleepy state, both parties keep using several languages, which, again, shows how comfortable both parties are with the usage of a multilingual code.

In summary, the following types of code-switching can be accounted for in the data:

1) Instances of bi- and even trilingual insertional and alternational code-switching with a speaker-related function: both informants know each other's personal and similar linguistic background well and can exhaust their multilingual proficiency to a big extent without having to expect any problems in their communication.

2) Discourse-related code-switching occurs when specific topics are brought up or require emphasis: the informants seem to switch to German, their native language, to discuss important issues, such as requests of urgency or when talking about friends and family.

The next section will discuss the analysis' findings in the greater context of the linguistic situation of Namibia.

6.   Discussion

The *WhatsApp* conversation data of both informants present interesting insights into the linguistic situation of Namibia, which will be thoroughly discussed in the following.

While this cannot be as clearly observed for informant B, informant A frequently uses English during her *WhatsApp* conversations despite her native tongue being German. During follow-up questions, A has also expressed that she generally prefers using English in conversations. Her sister, informant B, has stated that she has several German friends in and outside of Namibia, which she regularly keeps in touch with. This could explain why B's messages contain more German. The few occurrences of

Afrikaans within the data can be explained by the informants' background: Even though both informants have been in contact with Afrikaans from an early age and have learned it formally in school, only A currently uses the language regularly in her job. The majority of the few turns that actually include Afrikaans are also compiled by A. From this, it is obvious that there is an imbalance in proficiency of Afrikaans between both informants, which they both are aware of and, hence, Afrikaans gets rarely used during their conversations – except for a few brief insertions that might be formulaic in nature or could be considered borrowings. Afrikaans has had a long linguistic influence on the country (cf. section 2), so this would not be surprising. However the case may be, English is the language of choice for both informants for the majority of conversations within the data – and not their first language German. It would be interesting to see whether this represents a common phenomenon in Namibia: Do Namibian families, siblings, or friends with a very similar linguistic background actually converse in an L2 among each other on a daily basis? Further research would need to address this.

Example (5)

Siggi sagt drei halb 4. Weil die muessen um 6 in der kirche sein. **Suits me perfect**. Kann ich viell dein auto nehme? 12:30
(S. says 3 to 3:30. Cause they have to be at church at 6. **Suits me perfect**. Can I maybe take your car?)
Oder willst du mit? 12:30
(Or do you want to join?)
Kristin schläft 12:30
(K. is sleeping)

Okay. Mmh ja kannst haben. Kann lisa fich hier abladen?
Was ist um 18:00 bei de Kirche??? 12:30
(*Okay. Mmh* yes you can have it. Can L. drop you off here? What's at 6 at the church???)
Nein will lernen 12:30
(No I want to study)

Dunu they wane go to church 12:31
Ja **ill ask him** 12:31
(Yes)

Theres no church by my knowldge 12:31

Well apparently is *dalol* 12:31
Maybe weil erika gehn muss 12:31
(because E. has to leave)

Frag mal 12:31
(Ask)

So when i come back at 6 i can make dinner oder so 12:31
(or so)

Example (6)

U awake?	23:01

	Noch	23:02

Ic weiss nich ob ich 12 uhr schaff 23:02
(I don't know if I can make 12:00)
Mir fallm di augen zu 23:02
(I can hardly keep my eyes open)

Me too	23:03
Might have to nap	23:03
But scared I wont wake up	23:03

<u>Nou gaan slaap</u>. **Ull feel a bit more energized
tomo** 23:04
(<u>Go to sleep now</u>.)

The insertional code-switching found in the data is assumed to possess a speaker-related function. As the time codes next to messages suggest, the messages have usually been compiled in rapid succession, so intra-turn code-switching seems to happen effortlessly. Both informants have stated that their proficiency in German and English is equally high. So, both siblings know that, among each other, they can efficiently exhaust their, in this case, bilingual possibilities, i.e., they can compile their messages even containing several switches without causing any information loss while still satisfying the constraints of quasi-synchronous keyboard-to-screen communication (cf. Section 3). This allows for constructions like the intra-word switch presented earlier. Furthermore, the switches can rather not be seen as linguistic negotiation sequences as they are usually not met by any form of special response and still occur frequently. At least for informants A and B, this implies that frequent code-switching does not constitute an unusual phenomenon during conversation and can, thus, be considered an unmarked choice. As previously stated, code-switching seems to be a wide-spread phenomenon in Namibia (cf. section 2), as it is in many language contact situations. Further research should aim at investigating whether this case of conversationally unmarked code-switching, i.e., code-mixing, is a representative case for Namibia or whether it satisfies lexical needs, e.g., the compensation for lexical gaps possibly caused by lacking proficiency. Namibians frequently refer to what they consider their variety of English as *Namlish* – whether signs for conventionalized code-mixing can be found is another interesting question that would deserve attention. However, for the latter question, the current data will in all probability not be re-presentative as German is not widely spoken in Namibia anymore, even though it is certainly present in parts of Namibian society.

On that note, German, English and Afrikaans belong to the same language family of the Indo-European languages and share similar phonemes and morphological as well as syntactical features. As there are several other languages spoken in Namibia that do not belong to this language family and possess different features, the formal perspective of code-switching could be worth investigating with more data from Khoisan and Bantu languages.

The pragmatic function of alternational code-switching is another matter of interest.

While the informants in this study seem to only switch to their L1 when discussing topics that seem to represent importance, e.g., friends and family or matters of temporal urgency, would other Namibians organize their discourse in a similar manner? It would seem like a plausible choice to employ this type of code-switching, e.g., to minimize information loss. Additionally, for a keyboard-to-screen communication medium like *WhatsApp*, code-switching always represents a distinct visual stimulus that is sent to the recipient of the message – non-Indo-European languages would be even more salient in this regard.

Regarding features of keyboard-to-screen communication, both informants have not shown unusual behavior: both sisters moderately use typical means of shortenings, e.g., abbreviations like *lol* or *xx* (signifying kisses), as well as keyboard character-based emoticons or the more recent emoji-pictograms (cf. Example (1), Example (2) and Example (4)). The amount of misspellings and typing errors as well as the fast succession of turns seem to confirm Dürscheid's & Frick's (2014) assumption that *WhatsApp* communication seems to be based on a time constraint. Interesting to note in this regard is the non-standard German

spelling that could hint at a dialectal variation that is used by both informants.

This study, as a small-scale case study, does not aim at providing a representative description of code-switching in Namibia. However, with the presented data, several potential approaches to further research have been highlighted.

7. Conclusion

The present case study has shown that the linguistic contact zone in Namibia still deserves more attention from researchers. The complex language contact situation that has been shaped by the country's history and diversity has only started to be investigated. The briefly-introduced concept of keyboard-to-screen communication constitutes another field that has only started to gain attention by researchers but can provide linguists with interesting insights into the linguistic everyday lives of people. The data have revealed that, at least for the two current informants, English functions as a popular L2 for casual communication despite a shared German L1 background. German and Afrikaans, however, are observed in the messages, either in the form of smaller

insertions or as alternating sequences. The bi- and trilingual insertions are produced and perceived effortlessly by the informants and do not seem to represent a marked choice in their communication. Alternational sequences to German are found as discourse-related code-switching when the informants address a topic of greater importance, such as friends and family or urgent matters. Whether the findings are in any way representative for the whole country needs to be investigated with further research.

As the study has shown, in the future, linguists should investigate the addressed issues of language choice and potential code-mixing as well as the pragmatic functions of code-switching in conversations. Data from other informants, especially native speakers of Bantu or Khoisan languages, would provide great insight into this matter.

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