

New Englishes on YouTube: Sociolinguistic Considerations

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New Englishes & Sociolinguistics*

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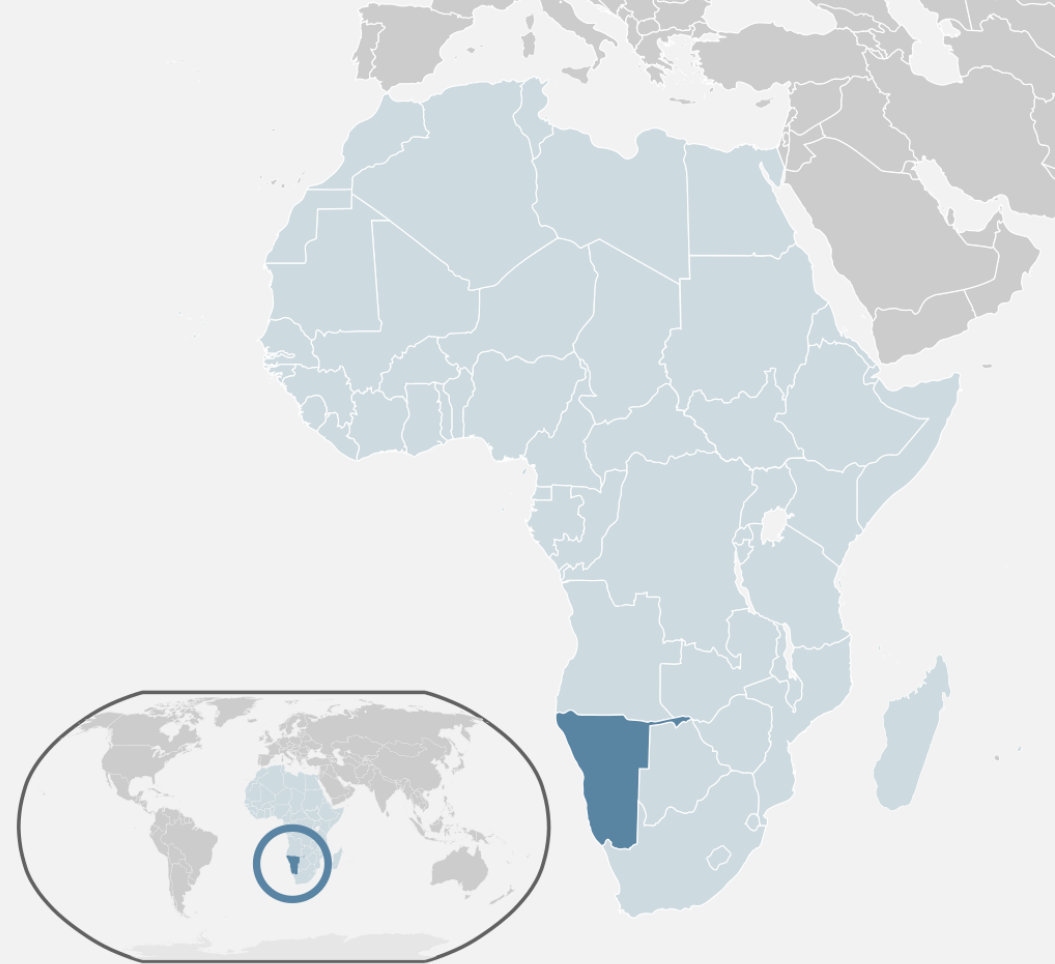
YouTube, a Sociolinguistic Nightmare?

- Schneider (2016: 261): “when we consider issues such as usefulness, systematicity, or retrievability, the question seems justified whether the coverage of World Englishes on YouTube should be viewed as **either a treasure trove**, opening up new avenues of research data, **or a nightmare**, restraining systematic access, sociolinguistic background information, etc.” (my emphasis)
- In spite of such issues, detailed sociolinguistic analyses of YouTube data are possible and should not be disregarded!

Namibia



- Population of about 2.6 million
 - One of the least densely populated countries in the world
- Since 1990, English has been the sole official language
- General Internet penetration rate in Southern Africa in 2018: 51%
(according to <https://www.slideshare.net/wearesocial/digital-in-2018-in-southern-africa-86865907>)
- Namibia's Internet penetration rate: 31%



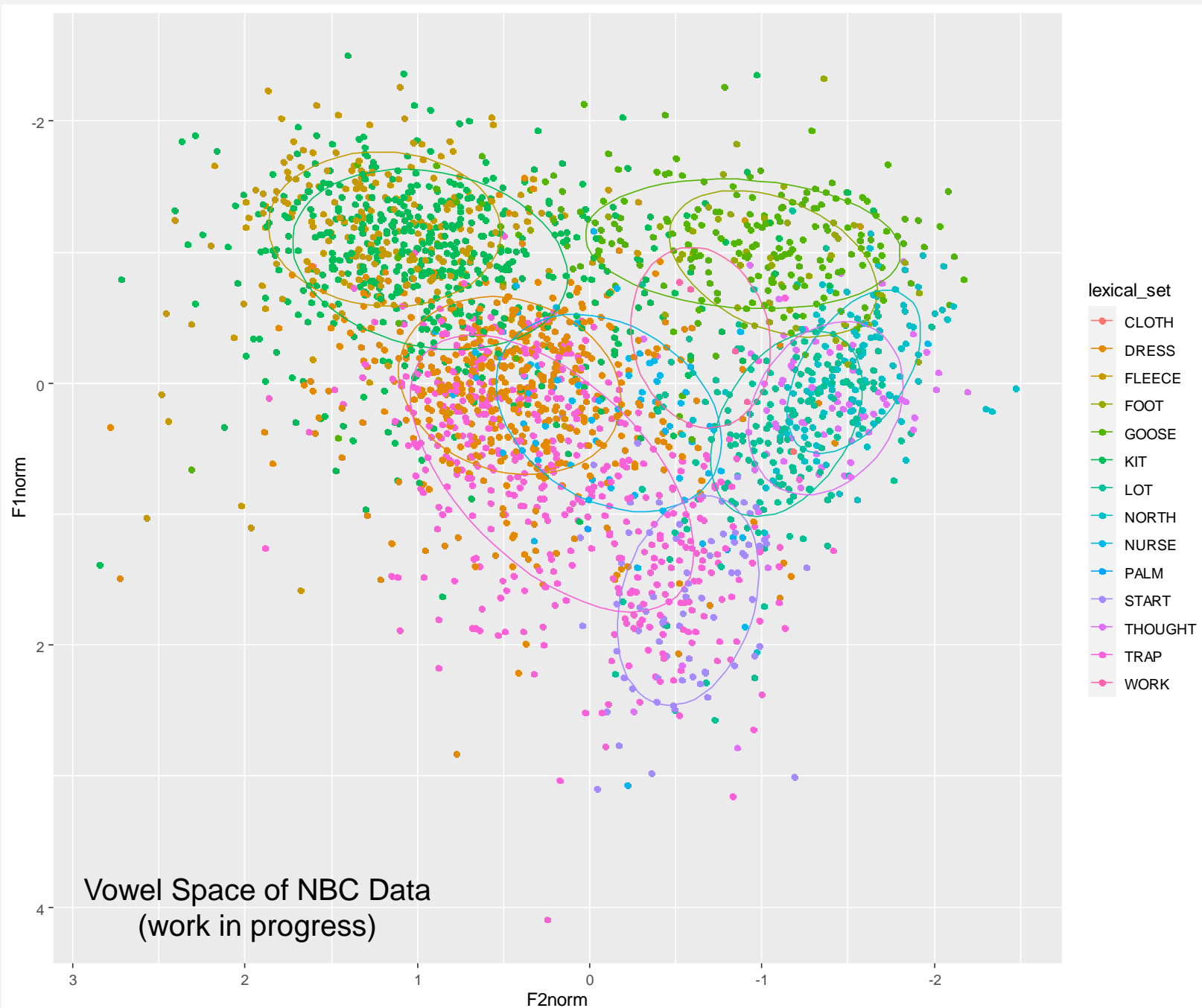
English in (Urban) Namibia: Developing (Phonological) Norms

- Previous studies investigate phonetic as well as phonological variation and find ethnicity to be an important correlate (cf. Buschfeld & Kautzsch 2014; Kautzsch & Schröder 2016; Stell & Fuchs 2019; Schröder et al. 2020, fc.)
- Influence of, for example, South African English(es) / Afrikaans-influenced varieties in terms of both exo- and endonormativity is discussed (cf. e.g. Schröder & Zähres 2020; Stell 2020), but it is not clear which variety of English could be considered an endonormative standard at this point



English in Namibia: Developing (Phonological) Norms

- Data source: YouTube channel of Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) (cf. Zähres fc.)
 - Active YT channel since 2015; ca. 5 to 15 videos daily; over 18,000 videos total (as of Sep. 2020)
 - Video content: mostly news reports (i.e. reading style data), some interviews
- Analysis of random selection of transcribed NBC news reports from mid-2018 (n=34; 3,651 vowel tokens)
 - segmentation and acoustic phonetic analysis via FAVE suite (cf. Rosenfelder et al. 2014; also Meer 2020; Meer et al. fc.)



Vowel normalization (Lobanov) via *vowels* package (cf. Kendall & Thomas 2018) in RStudio; Plots via *ggplot2* package (cf. Wickham 2016) in RStudio

English in Namibia: Digital Ethnography

- Videos found when searching for “*Namibian YouTuber*” (cf. Zähres fc.)
 - 2018: 292 by 79 individual creators
 - 2019: 464 by 160 individual creators*
 - 2020: over 520 by over 200 individual creators (as of Sep. 2020)
- The Namibian YouTuber network is growing
 - “core” network:
 - Small **NamCon** in 2018
 - *NamCon* 2019 significantly bigger & with official sponsors
 - Establishment of **AfriNam**

(Influencer & Digital Marketing & IT Solutions Agency)

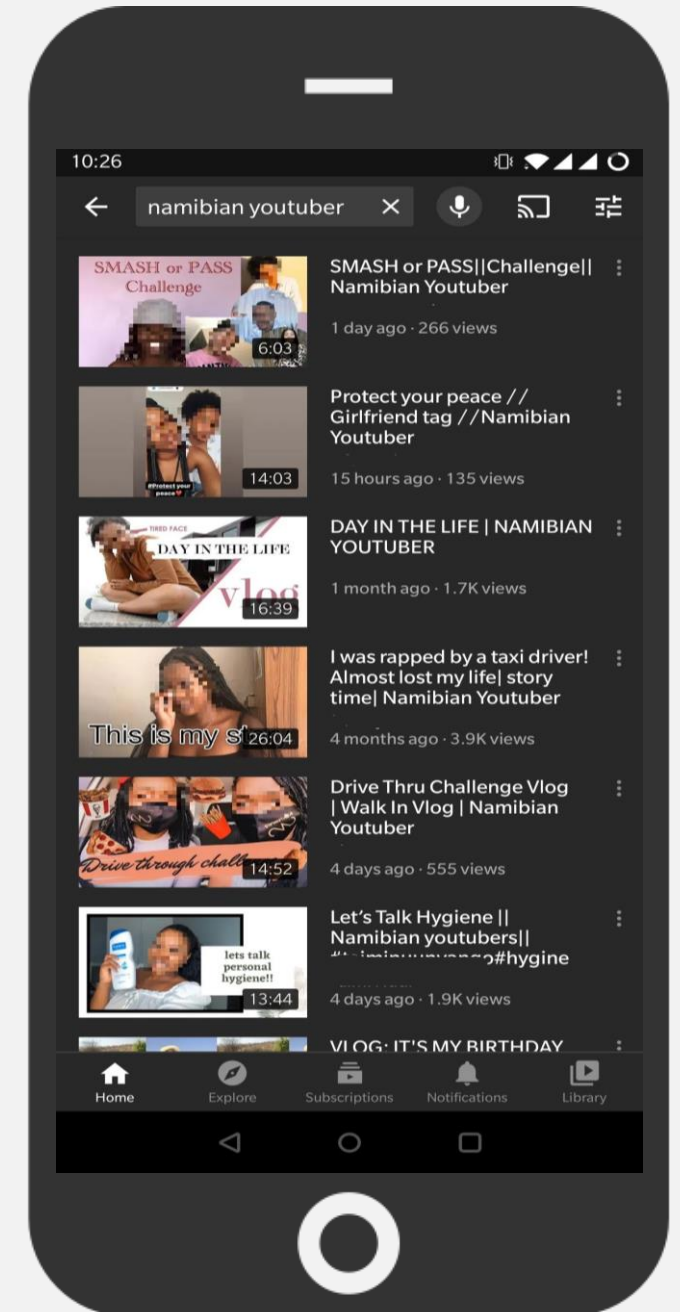


English in Namibia: Digital Ethnography

- Video formats that are specific to YouTube reveal a wealth of information on YouTubers (and their friends and family) that can form the basis of ethnographic work (e.g. “story time”, “a day in my life”)
- Many YouTubers create content over a span of years! → real-time diachronic approaches
 - Note: We must not be ignorant of research ethics here (cf. Pihlaja 2015)
- Working with this data is time-consuming and does not guarantee specific results, but that is true for non-digital ethnographic work as well...
- Hardly any studies use this data for sociolinguistic purposes!

Take-Away Points

- 1) YouTube is probably not the right medium for most “quick and dirty” quantitative approaches but offers rich data that can be utilized for various kinds of sociolinguistic studies, including the investigation of language norms and digital ethnographic work.
- 2) Data from otherwise underrepresented speakers can be found on YouTube.



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Thank you for your attention!

Any questions, comments, and other type of feedback are much appreciated.



<https://nenm2020.fzaehres.de>

SCAN ME!



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