Stability and innovation in Kroondal German, a sixth-generation South African German variety

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Kroondal German (KG) is a German variety spoken by a few hundred residents of Kroondal, a village in the North-West Province of South Africa. It has its roots in the spoken Low German of the missionaries and settlers who came from Lower Saxony, Germany, and founded Kroondal in 1889. Today, most descendants of these settlers still speak KG as their first language. Standard German also plays a prominent role in this close-knit community, largely due to the importance of the local German primary school and Lutheran church. Additionally, KG speakers use Afrikaans and South African English on a daily basis.

KG is now spoken by its sixth generation of speakers, which is unusual for a heritage language in the diaspora. In the first part of this presentation, I discuss the factors contributing to KG’s longevity as an extraterritorial German variety and its possible future. Most community members are actively involved in church and school activities, which are mainly conducted in German. Despite an increase in mixed marriages, KG remains a vital medium of communication within the community. However, external pressures, including encroaching mining operations, pose a threat to the survival of this German variety and its language community.

In the second part of the presentation, I introduce some salient morphosyntactic properties of KG and consider these against the backdrop of contemporary understanding of the factors shaping contact varieties. I focus on areas that are typically vulnerable in language contact situations, such as morphological case, grammatical gender, and auxiliary selection, and show that KG exhibits surprising stability, largely retaining properties characteristically associated with Standard German. I also present some notable areas of innovation in KG, which include the use of the gehen (‘go’) future and the extension of the modal müssen (‘must’). At first glance, both properties appear to result from contact with English and Afrikaans, but closer investigation reveals a more complex interplay of factors, including non-contact-specific general cognitive processes.

The presentation is based on the findings presented in a recently published book:

*Sixth-generation contact German in South Africa: The case of Kroondal German* (Shah, Biberauer & Herrmann 2024)

E-Book freely available here: [https://elpublishing.org/kroondal-german/](https://elpublishing.org/kroondal-german/)

More information on the KG project available here: [https://www.sheenashah.co.uk/kroondal-german](https://www.sheenashah.co.uk/kroondal-german)