Convergence towards and divergence from standard norms: The case of morphosyntactic variation and code-switching in informal spoken Afrikaans

Ever since the beginning of the process which eventually led to the demise of apartheid, the position of Standard Afrikaans in South African and Namibian societies has been questioned. Against the background of an ethnically and geographically divided Afrikaans speech community, it is time to take stock of the impact which the sometimes negatively perceived Afrikaans standard norm has been having on spoken varieties of Afrikaans.

Central to this research are the questions which varieties of Afrikaans that can be characterized in historical geo-ethnic terms are currently standing closest to and farthest from the standard norm in their actual informal spoken usage, and, by the same token, whether these varieties of Afrikaans are in the process of converging towards or diverging from one another.

In order to answer this question, a corpus of spoken Afrikaans has been gathered with the purpose of reflecting the most prominent lines of ethnic and geographic fragmentation within the Afrikaans speech community. The analysis of a selection of morphosyntactic variables in the corpus reveals trends of convergence towards and divergence from the Afrikaans standard norm. It also confirms some of the ethnic and geographic divides established in literature, while others are finding themselves mitigated. An additional analysis of code-switching in the corpus adds an interpretative and predictive value to these results, suggesting that not only language shift, but also a strengthened perception of group membership, are determining factors in levels of conformity or disconformity with the Standard Afrikaans norm.