

Book Review

Johanita, Kirsten. 2019. *Written Afrikaans since standardization: A century of change*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, xv + 227 pp. ISBN 9781498577205. \$ 100.00.

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<https://doi.org/10.1515/flin-2020-2053>

This book presents a corpus study of ongoing language change in Afrikaans. While previous work has focused on one or few aspects of recent change in Afrikaans, this study aims to give a more comprehensive view of these changes, by means of a corpus investigation of written Standard Afrikaans from the past century (more specifically the period 1911–2010). As such, the book explicitly relates to previous corpus studies of Mair (2006) and Leech et al. (2009) on ongoing change in contemporary English.

The book consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the central topics of the study: language change, its similarity to biological evolution, the role of language contact, and the question where to look for ongoing change. The chapter also identifies four grammatical areas in Afrikaans where ongoing change has been reported: temporal reference, pronouns, the genitive and connectives. Chapters 2 and 3 further elaborate on the theoretical issues presented in the introduction, while Chapters 5 to 7 present case studies of ongoing change in the four identified grammatical areas. Chapter 4 lays out the methodological choices of the study. The central issues of Chapters 2 to 7 will be summarized below.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework for the analysis and interpretation of grammatical change presented in the book. The study takes an explicit usage-based model of language and grammar, mainly along the lines of Croft (2001) and Bybee (2010). This usage-based perspective is argued to give rise to a number of trends: the rejection of the Chomskyan notion of Universal Grammar, the fundamental role of heterogeneity and variation in language, and a much fuzzier distinction between synchronic and diachronic linguistics. The model also comes with concepts such as emergent grammar, which “has no autonomous existence outside of mental representation and processing, and it is continuously adapted for use” (p. 15), and the exemplar model, in which “categories in the speaker’s memory are represented by a great cloud of recalled signs” (p. 15). The chapter also presents an evolutionary theory of language change, in which the approaches of Croft (2000) and Mufwene (2008) are scrutinized and compared.

Chapter 3 goes deeper into the standardization of Afrikaans, against the theoretical background of language ideology. Ideology is argued to be particularly visible in the standardization of languages, prescriptivism, and language purity, in line with the work of Blommaert and Verschueren (1998) and especially Milroy (2001). The standardization of Afrikaans, which mainly takes place in the twentieth century, is situated in a social climate of nationalism, striving for a pure standard language. This standard language is the language of the white cultivated elite, who uses it as an instrument for social exclusion of other speakers of Afrikaans, such as the working class, people of color and white people without formal education. Attitudes have changed since the establishment of full democracy in South Africa in 1994, resulting in a more inclusive approach to other varieties of Afrikaans. Nevertheless, most of the available Afrikaans from the past century is written in the standard variety produced by the white educated elite.

Chapter 4 is methodological in nature, presenting diachronic corpus linguistics as the preferred method of investigation. Corpus linguistics is argued to be compatible with the overall usage-based perspective of the study, as it gives us insight into patterns of variation and frequency in actual language usage. The method also allows us to explore linguistic and extralinguistic factors affecting language change, one of the explicit theoretical goals of this study. The chapter presents a new tailor-made corpus of written Afrikaans from the past century, consisting of texts taken from the intervals 1911–1920, 1941–1950, 1971–1980, and 2001–2010. The corpus aims to represent a wide variety of written text genres, including fiction, popular non-fiction, academic texts, and manuscripts. The total size of the corpus is rather modest in comparison to many other present-day corpora: only 261,000 words in total. One has to keep in mind, however, that this corpus has been made from scratch, mostly by the author herself, which of course is a tremendous job. The author thus understandably “had to stick to parameters that would be sufficient but realistic” (p. 63).

The empirical Chapters 5 to 7 bring together case studies of ongoing grammatical change in the areas of temporal reference, pronouns, the genitive and connectives. These case studies are organized according to the type of change they represent. Chapter 5 discusses studies of paradigmatic change, with a focus on preterit loss in the verbal paradigm and pronominal changes. Chapter 6 explores cases of grammaticalization, more specifically in the domain of future reference, pronouns, and the genitive. Chapter 7 has a focus on discursive and sociocultural changes, with case studies of connectives, colloquialization and formalization, and sexism in pronouns. Despite the breadth of research topics and perspectives, the case studies are built up in a remarkable uniform way. For each of the case studies under investigation, the author presents frequency data for the four intervals, either as bullets or in a table. These data are normalized per hundred

thousand words for each of the intervals so that the frequencies can be compared over time. A rise or fall in frequency in between two consecutive intervals is taken as an indication of language change. Let us have a closer look at some of the empirical findings in more detail.

Chapter 5 on paradigmatic change first discusses the loss of the preterit. Afrikaans is known to have reduced its verbal paradigm from two constructions expressing past tense reference, the synthetic preterit and the analytical perfect, both inherited from Dutch, to only the perfect. Corpus data show how the few preterits left in Afrikaans either become very rare in the past century (the preterits of the verbs *het* 'have', *mag* 'may' and *weet* 'know') or remain rather stable (the preterits of the verbs *sal* 'shall', *wil* 'will', *kan* 'can', *moet* 'must' and *wees* 'be'). These divergent trends are related to differences in frequency, in line with the usage-based approach of this study. The second part of the chapter is devoted to pronominal change. A notable change is that the reflexive pronouns in Afrikaans increasingly take an extended form with *-self*, as such conforming with the reflexive pronouns of English. This is the only clear case of potential influence of English on Afrikaans that was found in the corpus. The chapter concludes with a case study on the loss of the morphological genitive in Afrikaans.

Chapter 6 discusses a number of cases of ongoing grammaticalization. Within the domain of future reference, especially the verb *gaan* 'go' shows a clear increase of use as a future auxiliary. The onset of its grammaticalization can be traced back to Dutch, but it looks like Afrikaans has exploited the future potential of *gaan* 'go' more in the past century than Dutch. Among the pronouns, the grammaticalization of the lexical phrase *'n mens* 'a human' into a generic pronoun 'one' is an innovation in Afrikaans. The use of *'n mens* as a generic pronoun appears to be firmly established in the first interval of the corpus and remains fairly stable during the rest of the century. What we do see in the corpus is the progressive erosion of the original form *'n mens* to the reduced form *mens*, which is a typical feature of grammaticalization. The most elaborated case study in the chapter is on the grammaticalization of the genitive particle *se*, which goes back to the possessive pronoun *zijn* 'his' in Dutch. The particle is increasingly used in the course of the past century as an alternative for the preposition *van* 'of' in genitive contexts. The alternation between both types of genitive marker is investigated by means of two complementary statistical models: decision trees and logistic regressions.

Chapter 7 presents changes beyond the grammatical level, of which most point to either ongoing formalization or colloquialization. A straightforward marker of distance and formality is the use of the honorific second-person pronoun *u* 'you' instead of the more informal alternatives such as *jy*, *jou* and *julle* 'you' in Afrikaans. The corpus data show that honorific *u* gradually decreases in frequency across the century whereas the more informal alternatives become more frequent. This trend

is taken as a sign of ongoing colloquialization in Afrikaans. Other markers of formality, such as the use of the passive construction, show a more complex picture. All changes taken together suggest two opposite trends in Afrikaans of the past century. In between the first two intervals, there appear to be signs of ongoing formalization, following the initial standardization of Afrikaans. After a period of stability, then, the last intervals show the opposite trend of increasing colloquialization, which is related to the more inclusive attitude towards the standard language in present-day Afrikaans.

This short summary can only offer a glimpse of some of the case studies and theoretical reflections that are presented in the study. I hope to have shown that this book tackles an impressive range of case studies of ongoing change on the level of grammar and discourse in the recent history of Afrikaans. This is an ambitious feat indeed. It not only requires a broad knowledge of the grammar and history of Afrikaans and related Germanic languages, but also a great deal of stamina for compiling and examining large amounts of corpus data in such a systematic way. This said, the wide range of topics also has a downside. In the context of a medium-sized book like this, it implies that there is not enough space to give each and one of the case studies the detailed examination they require. As such, many of the case studies in the book should be considered as first explorations of the data, leaving ample room for further in-depth investigation. I believe that this book may serve as a valuable source of inspiration for such follow-up research.

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