

SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE

OTJIHERERO IN NAMIBIA AND IN OMATJETE

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Sociolinguistic profiles vary in scope, depth, differentiation etc. For the following profile I have chosen 11 aspects, of which it will not be possible to answer all of them with information pertaining to the Omatjete area (see map on p. 3). Much of what I write here is based on Rajmund Ohly's excellent sociolinguistic history of Herero ("The destabilization of the Herero language, 1987). Where it was possible I have included information specific to Omatjete.

Aspects of a sociolinguistic profile

1. Classification, dialectal variation and differentiation, regional distribution, number of speakers
2. Linguistic features: phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon (often with special reference to loanwords)
3. Who speaks it?
4. With which proficiency (L1, L2, L3 ...) Grammatical, functional, cultural, orature/literature?
5. Literacy
6. Domains (i.e. 'socio-culturally recognized spheres of activity' in which a language is used, a "social nexus which brings people together primarily for a cluster of purposes - ... and primarily for a certain set of role-relations" (Fishman 1965:72; 75). Spheres of activities may be: home, village, church, school, shop/market, recreation, wider communication, government and administration, work
7. Language attitudes and choice
8. Multilingualism and polyglossia
9. Language policy
10. Language development:
 - promotion and publication
 - codification
 - standardisation and education
 - foreign scholar involvement
11. Language vitality: positive, negative, and key factors

1. Classification, dialectal variation and differentiation, regional distribution, number of speakers

Herero is a Bantu language (Niger Congo – Benue-Kongo – Bantoid – Southern – Narrow Bantu – Central), classified according to Guthrie (1948) as R30. According to Ohly (1999:5) mainly three dialectal clusters may be discerned: Kaokoland Herero (also: Himba), Central Herero, and Mahalapye Herero (also: Mbanderu). These languages are spoken in Namibia (Herero, Himba, Mbanderu), Angola (Himba), and Botswana (Mbanderu). According to the 2001 census (Republic of Namibia 2003:4) 8 % of Namibia's population of 1'830'330 speak Herero at home, this makes ca 146'400 speakers today.¹ Other important languages are English, Afrikaans (both official languages, vehicular, some mothertongue speakers, especially for Afrikaans), the Wambo dialectal cluster (ca 50% mothertongue speakers), Nama/Damara, Bushman.²

2. Linguistic features

Herero is a typical, even conservative Bantu language, i.e. many of the typological properties of Bantu languages apply to Herero: It has retained an especially rich inventory of morphological forms, which have disappeared elsewhere. Herero has a 5-vowel-system and at least two tones (these and the following details are taken from Möhlig, Marten & Kavari 2002). Its nouns are organized in 16 classes, mostly in pairs of singular and plural (with the exception of the locative classes 16, 17, 18, and pairings with class 6: 5/6, 19/19+6, 15/6, 15/15+6). All elements depending on a noun must be marked with the respective concordant element (adjectives, numerals, pro-forms, verbal complexes). Word order is S-V-O. Especially interesting are the highly productive mechanisms for verb and noun derivation.

Depending on the time of contact, we find several layers of loan or migrant words. Ohly (1987:7) gives examples from Nama, Dutch, German, and English:

Nama: *!gawi* 'to ride' — *kavira*; | *honkoeb* 'master' — *omuhona*; *!khaib* 'cloth' — *otjikaiva*

¹ Interestingly, though Omatjete is located in the Erongo region, the census gives no Herero-speakers in this region (2003:6). Further, there seems to have been no explicit language question in this population and housing census (2003: Appendix 2, p. 91-92). It is therefore unclear where the above cited information extracted from the census comes from. According to Möhlig, Marten & Kavari, there are about 141'000 speakers in Namibia, and another 18'000 in Botswana (Möhlig, Marten & Kavari 2002:13). The Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com) gives 113'000 in Namibia, for Botswana and Namibia together 144'000. These numbers are based on the 1991 census.

² Based on the 1981 census, Ohly gives the following numbers (1987:26f, my compilation): Wambo 49,1%, Nama/Damara 13%, Afrikaans 11,6%, Kavango (Kwangali, Gciriku, Mbukushu) 9,3%, Herero 7,4%, German app. 1%, English app. 0,3%.

Dutch: *zalf* 'salve' — *osalva*; *zaag* 'saw' — *osaga*; *soldaat* 'soldier' — *omusoldate*

German: *Seife* 'soap' — *oseva*; *Kreuz* 'cross' — *otjikoroise*; *Tee* 'tea' — *otee*

English: baptism — *ombapitismo*; baptize — *papitisa*; store — *ostora*

While the Nama influence might be of older origin, German has ceased in the past 40 years to bear a great influence on Herero. Dutch – or rather Afrikaans remains an important influence until today, while English has most probably become more important, since with Independence (1990) it has become the first national language and the language of political and economical life in Namibia. However, I have no explicit information, this remains for the time being a hypothesis.

3. Speakers

Otjiherero is an ethnic language, i.e. it is spoken by people who identify themselves as belonging to one of the factions of the Herero Nation (i.e., Herero, Himba, Mbanderu, see above: ca. 150'000 speakers). There is no information available on this aspect, but I don't expect Herero to be spoken to a substantial degree by people outside this community/these communities. Al-



most half of Herero speaking people live in urban areas.³ Also, Herero is spoken in the so called 'communal areas' (former reserves), in the north: Erongo, Kunene (42 % of the population), in the centre/east: Omaheke (39%), Otjozondjupa (28%) (Republic of Namibia 2003: 5-17). The Omatjete communal area is populated by approximately 10'000 inhabitants, most of which are Herero mothertongue speakers.

4. Proficiency

Ohly (1987) attests the Herero language a rather low degree of 'development', i.e. it is an underdeveloped language (this is actually what his book is all about). According

³ Ohly (1987:28) speaks of 39% of Herero-speakers to live in urban areas. In Windhoek, 11% of the population speaks Herero (compare 31% Whites, 16% WWambo, 15% Coloureds, 14% Damara, 6% Basters, 5% Nama). Taking into consideration an increasing urbanization that took place in the past 15 years, I think it is safe to assume that now close to half of Herero speakers live in towns.

to him, though Herero may be taught at schools even up to university standard (on this see below), and literacy may be rather high in Otjiherero, it is mainly spoken as a colloquial language, i.e. in informal contexts. Ohly points out that those people who speak mainly Otjiherero have mostly low degrees of formal education. Their knowledge of the language is therefore low, too. On the other hand, the higher educated a person is, the more Herero is replaced as a first language by English and Afrikaans, reverting it to a status of “home language”, or a third language only (1987:68). I am critical of this view for at least two reasons. First, to not have formal knowledge, especially in the African context, does not per se mean low proficiency, or only colloquial level knowledge of language. We know from many contexts, that we have cultural and linguistic specialists who have never seen a school from the inside. This pertains to what we know as “inside language”, but also to poetic activities which may serve as an indicator for language proficiency. Second, Ohly is focused too much on written texts and (western) academic knowledge as an indicator for language proficiency. For instance, he does not consider orature as being part of linguistic knowledge and proficiency. Finally I am unsure how to interpret that on the one hand, in urban areas, Otjiherero is only a third language, and at the same time these people (mostly with rather good educational backgrounds) have the highest explicit linguistic knowledge. Herero is taught in schools from primary to university levels, therefore we may assume that there is a substantial degree of literacy in Herero, as well as good knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and orthography, at least of well educated people. However, as the experience with Tjeripo Musutua, my colleague, shows, such people may be more literate in English or Afrikaans than in Otjiherero.⁴ The a relationship between language use, linguistic knowledge, and proficiency, however, is not made explicit by Ohly.

5. Literacy

Namibia has an overall literacy rate of 81 % of the population of 15 years and older (census 2001, see Republic of Namibia 2003:4). We can only estimate the percentage of literate Herero people by consulting the information for those regions with a large Herero population in the census (Kunene, Otjozondjupa and Omaheke)⁵ and

⁴ He says that he is slower in taking notes in Otjiherero than in English (21 Feb. 2004).

⁵ I have left out Erongo district from this enumeration because I don't know how many Herero really live there. This is certainly an aspect to be researched.

the information on school attendance as represented in the Namibia Population Atlas (Republic of Namibia 2001: maps 17, 18). Not surprisingly, rural regions have lower literacy rates. Compared to other regions, also mainly rural regions, Kunene with 57%, Omaheke with 66%, Otjozondjupa with 67% literacy rate is clearly below the national mean.⁶ Khomas with 94% and Erongo with 92% literacy rate don't surprise me either, since here we find the most important urban and economical centres of Namibia with Windhoek, Swakopmund and Walfisbay. The information available does not allow any further conclusions.

The Level of Living Survey from 1999 gives "Population aged 6 years and above by ability to write in any language by region and sex" the following numbers for the three regions mentioned above (Republic of Namibia 1999:18):

Region	Any language	English
Kunene	Female : 75% Male: 79%	39% 40%
Omaheke	Female : 68% Male: 70	41% 39%
Otjozondjupa	Female : 74% Male: 78%	41% 38%
Namibia	Female: 81% Male: 83%	44% 45%

6. Domains, where Herero is spoken

Only (1987:26-74) dedicates a large portion of his book to this question. The following section will roughly summarize his findings. From my observations (see below specifically for Omatjete) I would assume that there have been no fundamental changes in the situation, except that the use of English increases.

Workplace (vertical situation):

- a) Administration: On the first level, the administration is dominated by Afrikaans and English (perhaps today: English and Afrikaans). It is only on the third tier administrative level that local languages play a role. However, according to

⁶ Other rural regions show considerably higher literacy rates, for instance Hardap 83%, Karas 87%, Ohangwena 79%, Omusati 83%, Oshana 89. Information on the distribution of literacy between urban and rural areas, between economically active and inactive groups, according to ethnicity (which, again, must be also seen in correlation to the kinds of economical activities) etc. would have to be obtained to give a valuable interpretation.

Herero speakers themselves, 60% use Otjiherero with the administrative authorities (Ohly 1987:42).⁷

- b) Production (mining, manufacture, farming⁸) and trade sector: 58,4% of workers used Afrikaans, whereby it becomes more important in urban working situations. Afrikaans here is used as a vehicular language (Ohly 1987:33). In

	Herero	Afrikaans ¹¹	Nama	English
Good friends	93%	45%	13%	16%
Church goers	90%	35%	11%	8%
Strangers	83%	43%		
Meetings	81%	34%	9%	8%
Shopkeeper	78%	56%	8%	6%
Influential people	69%	47%	6%	11%
At work (horizontally)			7%	8%

more homogenous workplace settings, the tendency is to use the in-group language. The Wambo have a minimal need for this vehicular language. English and German play only a minor role (ibid. 33-34). Again, for Herero, Ohly gives a 60% preference for Otjiherero (ibid.:42).⁹

- c) Contact situation (surrounding the workplace situation, i.e. horizontal situations)¹⁰

⁷ Actually, Ohly is not clear on this point: 60% of instances of uses, of persons saying they use Herero? Later on he says that 64% of office contacts in vertical office contacts, and 58% of contacts at the workplace are in Afrikaans (ibid.:43).

⁸ Ohly points out that 180'000 Namibians are employed in farming, however, only 6'000 in commercial farming.

⁹ When it comes to Herero, Ohly distinguishes "Kaokoland Herero", which is equalled to Himba (culturally; linguistically there are some minor differences) and Central urban-rural Herero (ibid.:41). Since Himba linguistic behaviour differs quite from the Central urban-rural Herero linguistic behaviour, and since Omatjete is part of the latter group, I will not include the Himba in my summary here. Generally we may say, that Himba speakers are more "self-sufficient" and conservative, with less contacts to the outside (at least that was the case in 1987, and to a certain degree also today. However I want to be careful here not to add to current prejudices and perceptions of Himba as being "backward").

¹⁰ Ohly's term is "labour reproduction".

¹¹ The origin for all these numbers is unclear. The first part (Herero) is taken from Ohly (1987:42), the other parts from p. 43. The data seem to come from different, but unstated sources (ibid.:42): "Other data disclose that ...".

School

Otjiherero is taught from primary school up to University Level. As a subject it is compulsory until Grade 6, from then on pupils may choose between their mother tongue, Afrikaans or English. Officially, Herero a medium of teaching up to Grade 2. However, in more remote areas, Herero is used as a medium for a longer period.

In Omatjete, most domains are dominated by Otjiherero: at home, in the village, in the shop and on the market, as well as during recreation. The school (Grades 1 –7) is supposed to be conducted in English, however, Herero seems to be the more important medium of instruction. During recreation phases children and teacher speak Herero. Depending on the origin of government representatives, the language used is either Herero (with the Office of the Agricultural Extension Service and the Office of Water Supply), or mainly Afrikaans (Police?). The latter has given rise to negative comments. People feel to be dominated by an ‘alien’ government here.

Herero is not a means of wider communication, but primarily used in in-group situations. The first linguistic choice in contact contexts is, as I have repeatedly experienced myself, Afrikaans (but on this see below).

7. Multilingualism

Most speakers in Namibia are, as elsewhere in Africa, multilingual. Depending on the region and the contacts that come with the specific linguistic situation of that region, the number of languages as well as the languages themselves vary. For instance, the

Himba in northern Namibia next to their mothertongue in the 1980s spoke¹² also Afrikaans, Wambo, Mbundu and Portuguese, while the Central urban-rural Herero spoke Afrikaans, English, Nama, and some Wambo (Ohly 1987:41). Ohly, based on Prinsloo 1982, gives the following numbers for language proficiency for Central urban-rural Herero-speakers (1987:41):

Proficiency	Herero	Afrikaans	English	Nama	Wambo
Spoken well	99,2 %	62,1 %	13,5 %	14,2 %	5,8 %
Understood well	99,2 %	64 %	11,5 %	13,3 %	6,4 %

There are no explicit data on proficiency in German. Employees in German industries and shops have acquired functional German (ibid.:34).

For Omatjete I can refer to impression only. Herero being the main and primary language, nevertheless almost everybody, even small children have acquired at least some knowledge of Afrikaans, Nama/Damara, and English. Certainly most people are quite proficient speakers of Afrikaans, as I could experience with the Nguni-workshop at the Omatjene Research Farm, where a number of farmers from Omatjete took part. It was interesting to note, however, that though people did understand the content of the formal instruction (in Afrikaans), someone from Omatjete travelled specifically in order to translate from Afrikaans into Otjiherero, should the need arise. I could observe only two situations where this was necessary. During lunchtime one of the farmers started at translating the categories for judging the quality of cattle into Herero, for mnemonic reasons: She said, she could memorize the Herero terms more easily than the Afrikaans terms (Helena Karumbi, 23 Sept 2003). This translation process gave rise to some discussions among the participants of the workshop (which I could unfortunately not follow for lack of knowledge of Otjiherero on my part).

English is available to some degree, but not very important in everyday matters (see also table above on ability to write in English). Especially elder people don't speak English, though they may understand it very well. I realized this when I asked some-

¹² Since the data on which this account relies is approximately 25 years old, I don't dare to use the present tense, though with the exception of the role of English I don't expect much to have changed since.

one in English about a landmark on the way to Omaruru and was answered by Chief Jeja, whom I was giving a lift, in Herero (22 Sept 2003).

Interestingly, many elder people from the age of ca 65 and above do speak German quite well. It was quite obvious that it is a workplace-German. It occurred that one elder person was not able to understand the honorific “Ihnen”, when I asked whether I would be allowed to take a photograph (“Kann ich ein Photo von Ihnen machen?”). Rather, he understood “innen”, and went to clean up his house inside. Which is at first sight a funny episode, to me was very embarrassing and reminded me that Apartheid structures could be very close contextually. Younger people between 30 and 40 years still understand some German.

I am aware that there is at least limited knowledge of Nama/Damara in Omatjete, but I can't say to which degree. There are a few Nama people living in Omatjete (eg. the security at the MAWRD compound). Also, there is a Nama/Damara school in Omaruru at which at least some children with a Herero background attend or have attended.

8. Language attitudes and choice

On a national level, Herero has no high prestige. This has to do with a general devaluation of African Languages, which are, as everywhere in Africa, seen as backward, incompatible with development and economic prosperity. As other local languages in Southern Africa, Herero had also been, just as Afrikaans, a means in the “Bantu education” system, which is today associated “with keeping them [the people] down and preventing their being integrated into the world of science and technology” (Bamgbose 2003:48). For Herero the situation within Namibia is even more difficult and complicated, since the Herero people themselves do not enjoy high esteem. In the context of an increasingly ethnicized political climate, Herero people are accused of not having contributed to the liberation struggle of the SWAPO (which is more and more – and falsely – portrayed to be the party of Wambo people), the blood-toll being paid by the Wambo alone, while Herero enjoyed privileges as Koevoet informants and collaborators of the South African regime.¹³ In addition they are seen as very

¹³ I want to add that a broader historical perspective will show that, for instance, the first paramount chief of the Ovaherero, Chief Hosea Kutako (1917 – 1970), was the first african Namibian to file a request for independence with the United Nations as early as the 1930s?. Other outstanding figures of Namibian political life have contributed to independence too, but they tend to be forgotten over what I would call a rather uncritical hero worship (which in many cases may be justified). It may be true that the Herero profited during the SWAPO

conservative, backwards, and arrogant. This is certainly part of a historically determined image which already started to be portrayed in this way (with an unsurprisingly derogatory undertone) by the German missionaries (Ohly 1987:13), followed up in the 1950s to 1980s by other European scholars and journalists (ibid.:23). On the other hand, Hosea Kutako, the paramount chief from 1917 until 1970 resorted to conservatism and isolationism as a means to reunite and revive the Herero nation after the genocidal war and the following dispersal of the people (Ohly 1987:22).

Herero people themselves do regret that Herero is not highly valued, but they are aware that their language does and will not play any kind of role in Namibia except as a local language with low esteem. Herero, and for that matter, Afrikaans, too, are not regarded as languages of the future (eg. Erika Kameho, 23 February 2004, Omatjete, see also Ohly 1987:47, table 22).

When it comes to choices of languages in the educational sector, parents of course today want their children to learn as much English as possible, in order to enable them the entry into the elite classes. According to Ohly the preference for Herero as a teaching medium or a subject decreases with the increasing phases of learning (ibid.:47). English becomes more and more important, and this pertains to today to an ever higher degree. Ohly further writes:

Language preferences such as Herero, Afrikaans and English in education are based on the assumption that the preferred language(s) is/are (a) the language of the future, (b) the vehicular language, (c) the favoured language, (d) the child's home language and (e) the only language the child understands ... (Ohly 1987:47)

In Omatjete, Afrikaans is certainly the first choice when operating in a multilingual and intercultural communicative situation. This is not in accordance with current governmental politics to further the use of English. The use of Afrikaans is certainly a remnant of pre-independence education and language use. There may also be, but this is so far hypothetical, an element of resistance against a national policy which is locally perceived to be highly biased towards Wambo-speaking people.

Afrikaans is tainted with the taste of Apartheid and South African rule and has been strongly opposed to by post-independent national politics. It was the language of

liberation war – or have been bribed by the South African authorities into collaboration. However, this discourse, where the time of civil war would be assessed regarding the role of all participants in the country, has been increasingly stonewalled (eg. Lombard, Christo 2001. *The Wall of Silence*, which resulted on such public pressure on the author that he chose to resign his post and leave the country. Christo Lombard, an Afrikaner himself, was – or even still is – member of SWAPO.).

workplace (nationwide) and perceived as the means of suppression. However, Afrikaans is also the mother tongue of quite a large population group – White, Coloured and Baster people, who become more and more important as economically very active and important middle class. For a long time it has been the major vehicular language in Namibia, and to some degree still is. I have noticed, for example, that white people

9. Official status and language policy

According to Sürig's sociolinguistic country profile – which otherwise seems not to be very reliable, Namibia has only one Official Language, English; Oshivambo is a National Language with official recognition (Sürig 2003:111f). Herero has no official status, but is taught as a subject in schools and up to university level (Möhlig, Marten & Kavari 2002:13).

English is the politically favoured language, “the language of the SWAPO exile government” (Alexander, but where does he say that?!?!). Thus, Namibia, may be seen in the tradition of post-colonial language policy in which colonial language policy continues, albeit with “black faces in white places” (Alexander 2003:23).¹⁴

10. Language development

According to oral traditions (Vedder 1934: 132 ff) and historical reconstruction (Möhlig 2000), (pre-)Herero speaking people around the 16th century left the lacustrine area of Central East Africa (Möhlig 2000), migrated via the Lunda corridor towards the west, and settled in the Luimbi-Luena region in south-eastern Angola, in the region of the southern Nyanheka-kingdoms. Under the impact of Portuguese slave raids in the 18th century they fled from that region into Kaokoland, where living conditions were much less favourable. From there, they began to migrate into Central Namibia, into the area between Owamboland in the north and Nama speaking groups in the south (Möhlig, Marten & Kavari 2002:14). In 1724 they had reached as far as (today's) Mariental, with their main centres Windhoek (Otjomuise), Okahandja and Ot-

¹⁴ Neville Alexander is one of the most outspoken critic of contemporary African and especially South-African language policies: “... the neo-colonial language policy is an important aspect of the middle class policy of neo-colonial regimes; it empowers the few against the interests and the rights of the many and helps to create and maintain a vicious circle of the poor majority becoming poorer and ever more marginalized and the rich few becoming ever richer and self-glorifying.” (Alexander 2003:24).

jimbingwe (Ohly 1987:5). The first half of the 19th century was marked by an impoverishment of the Herero people brought about by frequent raids of the Oorlam troops. In 1860 to 1870 the Herero managed to liberate themselves from this – as they saw it – pest. It followed a period of relative stability and prosperity, a result of military and economical dominance of Herero in Central Namibia, which was made possible through trade relations to the Cape region, the accumulation of cattle and a internal political consolidation of chiefs and chiefdoms (Henrichsen 2000:154ff), and a relatively stable ecological situation.¹⁵ Ohly summarises the period between 1724 – 1880 as a period where the demographic situation stabilizes and consolidates, with Nama, Owambo, Caprivi, Bushmen, Cape Dutch/Baster Dutch present. German, Dutch and English were established as contact and vehicular languages, however on a limited scale. The importance of Dutch as a trade language in tendency led to a devaluation of – in this case – Nama. On the other hand, Herero was an important means within Herero community, not only as colloquial, but also as language of literary value (Ohly 1987:8). The lexical innovations mentioned above may have taken place in that period.

The beginnings of the development of Otjiherero (in the sense of Western oriented language planning or engineering) started, as elsewhere in Africa, with the arrival of European Missionaries. Six missionaries (H. Hahn, J. Rath, F.W. Kolbe, H. Brincker, I. Irle, G. Viehe) were involved in compiling and publishing grammars, lexicographical material, dictionaries, materials on the historical dimension of Herero, the translation of the bible and other religious texts, orature and schoolreaders. They further worked on the engineering of a Christian religious vocabulary through coining and shift in meaning (Ohly 1987:13f). In this context Ohly identifies two factors for the “destabilization” of Otjiherero. First, a negative attitude of the missionaries towards the language (and the people) which lead to biased dictionaries (Ohly 1987:13 gives an example from Brincker 1964:196), and the neglect of the collecting of poetry. Second, the missionaries’ activities were not well coordinated which led to regionally varying religious vocabulary, and, more importantly, in my opinion, differing orthographies (ibid.:13f). Ohly summarizes this first period as follows:

¹⁵ With maybe the exception of the north, all of Namibia to a high degree is exposed to unstable weather conditions (taken over the year/years).

The main achievements of this phase [i.e. until 1905] comprised the establishment of the inventory of the basic Herero lexicon, the inventory of the Herero grammar and the employment of Herero as school medium and language for special purposes (i.e. religious). The publication of numerous religious texts and schoolbooks in Herero became conducive to the standardization of the language (ibid.:14).

In the next few years not much happened in the context of development of Herero as a language, i.e. in terms of terminological development. Within – then – Southwestern Africa Herero would increasingly be connoted negatively, both as people and language. “The interest in the Herero language was reduced to the necessities of a master-servant relation, i.e. to grammatical handbooks (cf. Meinhof, Brockmann, Vedder)” (ibid.: 24). On the other hand academic interest in the language brought it into prominence as a subject of African language studies, for instance at the University of Cape Town (ibid.:25).

From the sixties onwards “language engineering” (Ohly’s term) was based on educational, popularising and academic considerations. In order for Herero to be fully effective as written language for use as subjects in the primary, secondary and tertiary education, a Standard Orthography¹⁶ was developed and the vocabulary at primary and secondary school levels modernized¹⁷ (ibid.:50). Both the Bureau for Indigenous Languages through a Language Board and the Herero Subject Committee were concerned with the introduction of modern terminology (to prevent “clumsy” – Ohly’s term – *ad hoc* coining) (ibid.: 51). The more popularising approach to language development led to the stimulation of literary creativity. Academic interest led to the formation of a Department of African Languages:

“The establishment of the Department of African Languages at the Academy ... created the possibility of forming a systematic research programme indispensable in the teaching process at a university level. Herero grammar and literature had to be presented in a modern form and the necessary scientific literature for courses had to be prepared. The work in this direction has been started by R. Ohly. (ibid.: 53).

Wilfried Haacke, until now Head of the Department at – now – Unam, was Ohly’s successor. Today, Herero is taught at the University of Namibia, other universities

¹⁶ Further, the agreed-upon orthography (cf. Department of National Education 1983) is disjunctive against the prosodic word structure (Möhlig et al. 2002:13).

¹⁷ Whatever this specifically means, remains unclear for lack of examples.

concerned with Herero language are the SOAS (London), Stellenbosch (?), University of Cologne (Germany), University of Frankfurt (Germany).¹⁸

All in all Herero has been fairly well described, at least on a general linguistic level, including vocabularies and dictionaries (for bibliography see Möhlig, Marten & Kavari 2002, Ohly 1987, 1999). A number of oral texts and/or their analysis have been published (eg. Irle 1917, Vedder 1938, Dammann 1982, 1987, Bollig ???, Kavari 2002, 1997), contemporary literary texts, however, are rather scarce (eg. Mbai 1998, Hihanguapo 1993, Muniazo 1992, Schoeman & Kamaṭuka 1984). Further there are textbooks on Herero available for grades one to 10 (*Eraka ndi tu hungira*, various authors). On a national level, there are no daily publications or television programs in Herero. However, there seem to be local radio stations which broadcast in Herero, (mostly) religious music, and information. Herero does not seem to be on a high priority nationally, but this probably pertains to most local languages (including Afrikaans), with the exception of Oshiwambo.

11. Language vitality

At present there is certainly no indication that Herero should be endangered in any way at present or in any foreseeable future. The Herero society as such is not under demographic or (serious) political pressure, and Otjiherero will persist as the most important means of intra-ethnic communication. However, and this is Ohly's main concern (1987), there is no sign of improving the situation of Otjiherero towards a developed language, rather it stays a language with low prestige. The main trend is to send children to schools where they are taught in English as a medium as early as possible, choosing Afrikaans (or maybe an other European language) as a subject. Herero is taken for granted, at the same time the importance of at least some formal knowledge of Herero an aspect of children's education and intellectual development has not been recognized at all.¹⁹

Ohly is not very optimistic about the future of Otjiherero as a fully recognized language. He writes (my excerpts from pp. 69 - 78):

The stimulation of a Herero cultural renaissance is only possible in a favourable social climate, i.e. it must have the support of all parts of the Namibian society.

¹⁸ Possibly, this list is not exclusive.

¹⁹ However, this is not surprising, rather it is a phenomenon to be encountered all over Africa, cf. Bamgbose 2003, Alexander 2003.

Otherwise a Herero consciousness movement would be hostile to all antagonistic groups (69).²⁰

The removal of obstacles hampering development of Namibian languages demands renouncement of three factors: (a) language supremacy, (b) language ethnocentricity and (c) language manipulation.

Language supremacy is expressed in Namibia through ill-balanced multilingualism. It has been taken for granted that African languages are not cultured in comparison, with, for example, Afrikaans or English, and therefore are not capable to fulfil the role of a cultural medium of higher standard. ... Attitudes of language supremacy can only be removed by acknowledging linguistic evidence that 'primitive languages' do not exist. (71)

Ethnocentricity in language terms concerns ... in Namibia Afrikaans. As a result a career in Namibia can only be entered if the black individual becomes Afrikaansified.²¹ he must be able to complete secondary and higher education in Afrikaans [English]. The fact that only 1% of all black students at school had reached Matric [Abitur] in 1981, might be interpreted as a malicious policy of the administrative and well-off elite which was only interested in the reproduction of their own stratum...(71).

Language manipulation consists in using language engineering to benefit certain social factions only. In Namibia, for example, English is suddenly launched by church organizations, second-tier authorities, political parties and the press not because of its social utility, but as an expression of political opposition towards the central government identified with Afrikaans. Thus language makes the enemy visible ...

The employment of English in secondary schools as a medium by some administrations may also be understood as an impulsive reaction to the fact that thousands of Namibian inhabitants [many of them refugees and former SWAPO fighters] undergo professional training abroad with English as language of instruction. These cadres will likely play a major role in independent Namibia and therefore, in order to keep pace with coming events, the Wambo youth must acquire English....

The fragmentation of the Namibian society, as a result of language manipulation, has become more contrastive. (73).

It is notable, how clearly Ohly saw how the path for the development and status of Namibian languages was laid out.

²⁰ Maybe we are witnessing this, in a more moderate form, through the current affair around paramount chief C. Riruako who in Dec. 2003 left the DTA with NUDO, an old-time ethnic Herero party. NUDO has become again its own registered party, however with little success, as recent elections in Grootfontein (13 February 2004) have shown. His policy is criticized within his own followers, the Herero people themselves. (Not necessarily every Herero voted DTA, however, Riruako is paramount chief of ALL Herero. His leaving of the DTA has led to a further ethnicization of politics. It has now become difficult to be BOTH Herero AND member of the SWAPO, because if being Herero means being NUDO, one cannot, at the same time be also SWAPO. Though maybe inadvertently Riruako now forces the hand of Herero people. At the moment it is unclear whether they will follow or ask the "Vertrauensfrage". The chances for the latter are not really good, since this DTA/NUDO – Affair (as a Senior Headman in Omatjete put it to me – and refused to give his opinion about it) is only the latest bout of ethnicization in a process that has been going on for quite some time.

²¹ And I would add today: Englishified?

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