SALALS 2021 Conference
Paper 51

Click Consonants in Post-Shift Lexical Retention: Some Preliminary Observations

Camilla R Christie

Abstract
Although endangered, the Khoekhoe-branch languages Nama and Damara, as spoken in Namibia and standardised together as Namibian Khoekhoe, are well-documented. By contrast, Nama as spoken in the Namaqualand region of South Africa is undocumented and understudied, and has been critically endangered both by ongoing language shift to Afrikaans and by the more recent introduction of standardised Namibian Khoekhoe into local schools. Only two linguists have published data on SA Nama in the last thirty years (Links 1989; Witzlack-Makarevich 2006).

While working with monolingual Afrikaans-speakers in the Namaqualand region, Links 1989 observed that many of his consultants retained an SA Nama lexis, and that they made regular use of these items as loanwords in daily Afrikaans conversation (Links 1989: 61 – 66). However, these speakers were unable to produce the expected SA Nama click consonants accurately or consistently. Most varied between click types when using loanwords, often producing a different click type across multiple tokens of the same item within the same utterance. Although the existence of these "unstable" click consonants was acknowledged by South African linguists (Traill 1995; Den Besten 2013; Mesthrie 2017), no further research into post-shift lexical retention in the Namaqualand region was ever carried out.

This paper presents a selection of SA Nama loanwords used by monolingual speakers of Namaqualand Afrikaans, as collected during MA and PhD field research sessions in Namaqualand. Detailed evidence for variation in post-shift click consonants is discussed, together with side-by-side comparisons of L1 SA Nama click consonants and L1 Namaqualand Afrikaans click consonants. Two primary trends emerge: some speakers employ numerous click types and accompaniments in extreme variation, while others reduce all loaned click consonants to a single type with only minor variation in accompaniment.

Comparison is then drawn with the similar behaviour of click consonants in post-shift lexical retention in a closely-related Khoekhoe-branch language, Kora. Looking further afield, these observations are also compared to reports of variable click consonants in several NTU languages, including ruManyo, ruKwangali, thiMbukushu, shiYeyi, and chiFwe. Extreme variation culminating diachronically in a reduced click inventory is posited as the normal condition of click consonants transferred from a click language to a non-click language via shift.

Keywords: Khoekhoe-branch languages; click consonants; language contact; language shift; paper