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Kroondal German: An overview of the language and its speakers

Kroondal German is a variety of German spoken by a few hundred inhabitants living in the village of Kroondal in rural South Africa. It was established as a Lutheran congregation by German missionaries in 1889 and till today, the religious affiliation to the Lutheran church is an important marker of Kroondal identity, together with the German language. In Kroondal, the German school and the Lutheran church are the main institutions for the promotion of German. Standard German is used as the medium of instruction in the school and the German Lutheran bible is used in the church. Satellite television programmes from Germany add to the exposure of Standard German among Kroondal inhabitants.

Nevertheless, speakers of all generations residing in the area use Kroondal German which deviates from Standard German in several respects. While the older generation predominantly had contact with Afrikaans, which they all speak as a second language, the younger generation has slightly more exposure to English than Afrikaans, even though Afrikaans remains a prominent contact language also among them.

The presentation opens with a brief historical overview of this community. This is followed by a detailed description of the sociolinguistic situation of the speakers, considering in particular the multilingual situation which the speakers find themselves in and the language attitudes they hold towards Kroondal German. The second half of the talk is dedicated to the presentation of language data, with a focus on the morphosyntactic characteristics of the language. The contact-induced deviations from Standard German can often be traced back to the influence from Afrikaans and/or South African English. Kroondal German is also compared to other German varieties spoken in South Africa as well as in Namibia. Some of the morphosyntactic features discussed seem to be unique to Kroondal and have their origins in German varieties spoken in Germany while others occur in German varieties spoken in Southern Africa or are more typical of extraterritorial varieties of German in general.