

German in the Pacific area

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The relevant map is listed at the end of this text.

1. Introduction

German influence in the Pacific dates from the early 1860s when the Samoan-based firm of Godeffroy and Sons established trading posts in many parts of Polynesia and Micronesia. Contacts were intensified and extended to parts of Melanesia (mainly the Solomons and the Bismarck Archipelago) in the 1870s. Following the establishment of the German Reich, a number of areas were subsequently annexed as protectorates and colonies, including the Marshall Islands (1878), North Eastern New Guinea (Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land) and the Bismarck Archipelago (1884), the Marianas and the Carolines (1898), Kiautschou (1898) and Samoa (1899). German Government control in all these territories came to an end soon after the outbreak of World War I. German controlled missions continued to be influential in some areas, though few of them remained important after World War II.

None of Germany's Pacific possessions attracted a significant number of German settlers. By the end of German colonial rule the following numbers were recorded:

| | Number of German residents in 1919 | |
|---|------------------------------------|----------|
| | Civilian | Military |
| German New Guinea, Carolines, Marianas and Marshall Islands | 750 | 20 |
| Samoa | 260 | 330 |
| Kiautschou | 4,300 | 2,632 |

The most prominent occupational groups were missionaries, planters, traders and administrators. Most Germans were short-time residents only,

and many of them had left their families behind in Germany.

Intermarriage and miscegenation with the local population was not a frequent occurrence, and overall had little linguistic impact. A sole exception is the creole German of the half caste community of Rabaul, the former capital of German New Guinea.

Whilst German presence in the Pacific left few direct traces, its indirect importance is difficult to overestimate in Melanesia. Forty years of German colonial presence brought about a significant change in the linguistic ecology of the area. Particularly important were:

- The founding of a large number of European towns and settlement.
- The setting up of mission stations and plantations.
- Large scale resettling of nomadic people.
- Large scale labour trade to Samoa and Micronesia.
- Introduction of schooling and literacy.

2. The German language in the Pacific

In assessing the impact of German on various Pacific languages, one should draw a distinction between the day-to-day reality of colonial life on the one hand and official language policies (and their implementation) on the other. One notes, in particular, the discrepancy between the official attempts to make German the language of the German colonies in the Pacific and the colonial reality where a number of indigenous and European (in particular English and Pidgin English) languages were used in everyday communication.

The success of official policies can be seen from both anecdotal evidence and official statistics

on school attendance. I shall discuss these for each of the territories under German control:

2.1. *Micronesia (Carolines, Marianas, and Marshall Islands)*

Although these islands were acquired from Spain, English traders and missionaries had spread both regular and pidgin varieties of English to many parts. Due to the small size of the individual islands and their populations, attempts to replace English and Spanish with German appear to have been relatively successful. In contrast to Samoa and New Guinea, the German settlers appear not to have resorted to Pidgin English in their dealings with the indigenes, in spite of the fact that early sources indicate that Pidgin English must have been relatively widespread. In a report on the development of the German colonies in the South Seas (Denkschrift über die Entwicklung der Schutzgebiete in Afrika und der Südsee im Jahre 1906/7. Reichstag Aktenstück zu Nr. 622, S.4123) we read:

One has to agree with the teachers' complaint that their pupils have had insufficient opportunities to apply their knowledge of German outside the classroom. However, one can observe a change for the better, since the German settlers avoid the use of Pidgin English in their dealings with the natives. In the Marianas, Pidgin English has been eradicated well and truly for some time now. In addition, it must be mentioned that the use of German has become established, particularly among the younger natives, not only in Saipan but also in Palau and Yap (author's translation).

In the Carolines, German education began only after 1902 when Spanish monks were replaced by German missionaries, as it did in most part of the Marshalls. In some areas the impact of German education was a long lasting one.

Solenberger (1962: 59-60) reports that German influence was still found in the Marianas in the early 1960s:

In the short period from 1899 to 1914 a small staff of Germans so impressed those inhabitants of the Northern Marianas who were educated within that period that they still show a marked preference for German speech, literature, music, and dances. Use of German by both islanders and some of the recent American administrators carries the prestige of a somewhat authoritarian efficiency which the islanders are fond of ascribing to the Germans. In 1952 most Chamorro and Carolinian leaders were products of the German *Volksschule*, and the handwritten German alphabet remained in use for personal correspondence in Carolinian—which is rarely written otherwise.

Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain official documents on language policy and language teaching. However, from the sources just quoted, one gains the impression that there was considerable agreement between official and private (including mission) views on language matters.

2.2. *Samoa*

When Germany took over Samoa in 1899, both English and Pidgin English were fairly well established, the former as the normal means of communication in the small multinational white community, the latter among the imported black plantation labourers (cf. Mühlhäusler 1979). In fact, Samoa remained the "least German colony of the German Reich" (author's translation, *Samoanische Zeitung*, 26 July 1913) until the end of German control.

Official attempts to promote German in Samoa date from the beginning of colonial control, when attempts were made to exclude other European languages from the school system. The *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* (1901: 599) reports that the following instructions were sent to missions operating in Samoa:

Shortly after the German flag was raised in March last year, I made it clear to the

missions operating in the protectorate that it must be the aim of the Government to take steps against the undesirable state of affairs that in a German colony European languages other than German were preferred by the natives.

Having given the missions a year's grace to adapt to the changing circumstances, I now proclaim that, as of July of this year, the medium of education in the schools for natives will be Samoan and that no European languages other than German can be permitted in the syllabus of these schools (author's translation).

A full attempt to spread German to a wider section of the population was made in 1909 when a government school for Samoans (mainly members of aristocratic families) was set up. Out of 23 weekly hours of tuition, nine were devoted to the study of German. In 1911, 60 Samoans attended this government school. There was also a government school for white and mixed-race children with 14 white and 127 mixed-race children. V. Koenig (in *Koloniale Rundschau*, 1912: 731) writes:

The pupils exhibit particular interest for military exercises which take place under the guidance of a former noncommissioned officer of the Samoan police force. The school has been quite successful, and it constitutes the best way to promote German ways and education for a working life (author's translation).

Outside the government offices English was even more widely used than inside. There was a frequently mentioned (and often deplored) tendency among the German settlers to use English as their everyday language in their dealings with the Samoans and non-German Europeans. A pidgin variety of English was used with the 1,000 or so Melanesian workers employed on the plantations of the *Deutsche Handels- und Plantagensellschaft*. It appears that English was the unofficial prestige language,

and repeated attempts by private and official bodies did little to change the attitude of the German settlers.

In addition to switching to English, many of the settlers borrowed heavily from this language. Commenting on this phenomenon, the *Samoanische Zeitung* (26 July 1913) writes:

Instead, one can often hear a lingo which would be unintelligible in the mother country and which is hardly less ridiculous than the infamous American German. In trying to establish the causes of this linguistic deterioration, one most often finds laziness of thought (author's translation).

As a result, virtually no traces of German are left in present-day Western Samoa, not even among the mixed-race German-Samoan community.

2.3. *Kiautschou*

There were more German settlers in Kiautschou than in any other Pacific colony. In addition, there was no strong tradition of English-dominated trade. As a result, the position of the German language before 1914 was a strong one. Friederici (1911: 97) writes:

During the campaign in China, the Chinese "boys" of my cavalry regiment spoke a smattering of German, in spite of the fact that no one had made an effort to teach them this language. When I was last in Tsingtau (= Kiautschou), quite a few Chinese spoke German. I understand that nearly all Chinese who are in touch with the Germans speak the language of the latter (author's translation).

Local schools were numerous, but the standard of teaching provided was very low. In 1904 there were 246 schools with 2,994 pupils according to Government statistics, mostly run by local Chinese. Plans to introduce compulsory German-controlled schooling were not implemented because of the First World War. However, even

in the days before compulsory schooling, a considerable effort was made to spread German through education. The *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (24 May 1913) reports in an editorial:

In Kiautschou, much has been done in recent years in the field of instructing the Chinese in the German language. We do not know to what extent English is used in everyday communication. However, judging from the attitudes of the "Tsingtauer Neuesten Nachrichten", it would seem that the role of German as the everyday language of Kiautschou is quite satisfactory (author's translation).

Examples of Chinese speaking fluent German are discussed by Mühlhäusler (1979, 1983). More significant are reports from a large number of sources pointing to the emergence of a Chinese Pidgin German as the everyday work language of the colony. Details are given by Mühlhäusler (1984).

Workers from other German Pacific colonies, particularly Micronesia, who had worked in Kiautschou for extended periods of time returned to their homeland speaking some Pidgin German they had picked up there.

2.4. German New Guinea (Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land and Bismarck Archipelago)

More is known about the language question in New Guinea than in any other colony. The reasons for this include the fact that the endemic multilingualism in New Guinea (with hundreds of languages spoken in former German New Guinea alone) posed a severe problem to effective communication; that the system of employing indentured labour in the developing plantation economy increased the contact between speakers of different vernaculars; and that the proximity of Australia and several British colonies was regarded as a threat to the cultural and political stability of German New Guinea.

When Germany first established control over the Bismarck Archipelago and Kaiser-Wilhelms-Land, little was known about the linguistic

situation of the new colony. The general opinion at the time was that a greater knowledge of the languages spoken there would lead to the best solution of the communication problem.

From its inception in 1884 to 1899, German New Guinea was administered by the New Guinea Company of Berlin, while after 1899 it was an imperial colony of the German Reich. It appears that the New Guinea Company was not seriously concerned with questions of language policy, its main preoccupation being economically to consolidate the colony. Those in charge of the areas controlled by the company adopted a *laissez faire* attitude by encouraging the spread of Pidgin English (=Tok Pisin) in the Bismarck Archipelago and Coastal Malay on the New Guinea mainland. Apparently no efforts were made to spread the German language in the first years of German control. Friederici's attack on the New Guinea Company (1911: 94) on account of its failure to implement effective German language policies sums up the official attitude:

When the New Guinea Company assumed sovereignty, it encountered Pidgin English and, as the representative of the German Empire, faced a task which, at the time, would probably not have been difficult to solve in the national interest. Yet nothing, or virtually nothing, happened in this respect (author's translation).

In contrast, the years between 1900 and 1914 were characterized by the attempts of the German colonial government, and in particular the governor, Dr. Hahl, to eradicate Pidgin English and replace it with German. The administration recognized that the replacement of Pidgin English with German would be a very gradual process. The implementation of such a policy had to rely on two factors; first, the gradual relexification of Tok Pisin with lexical items of German origin and its eventual replacement by Pidgin German and secondly, formal schooling of large numbers of New Guineans in German.

Regarding the introduction of German by means of education, little progress was made in

establishing state schools. The first state school for indigenes was opened in 1908 and for European children in 1909. The former had a total enrolment of 500 in 1912 compared with more than 22,000 students enrolled in mission schools. Only 13 children attended the European school.

An education ordinance intended to restructure and vastly expand teaching facilities, in particular those for teaching German, was to become law in January 1915. One of the central aims of this new ordinance was to eradicate Pidgin English and replace it with simple German. However, World War I came to the colony shortly after the education ordinance had been drafted and the new language and education policies which might have changed the linguistic situation in German New Guinea remained unimplemented.

After the withdrawal of the German protective forces and settlers, the number of Germans that remained was very small, though German teaching by mission schools continued until the outbreak of World War II. Nonstandard varieties of German were more important and some traces have survived until the present.

Pidginized varieties of German of greater or lesser stability are found on mission stations, particularly in the kitchens or workshops that were run by monolingual German speakers. Pidgin German does not appear to have been used in the more important plantation context.

Texts recorded by me between 1972 and 1976 show that stable Pidgin German had developed and that individual speakers employed different strategies when speaking a reduced form of German. Examples are:

Text 1 Speaker Fritz from Ali Island, 1973. This text is structurally very close to Tok Pisin and probably largely the result of relexification. Fritz is also a fluent speaker of Tok Pisin.

- PG (Pidgin German): *Ja frueher wir bleiben. Und dann Siapan kommen.*
 TP (Tok Pisin): *Yes bipo mipela stap. Na bihain Siapan kam.*
 E (English): Yes, at first we remained. Then the Japanese came.

- PG: *Wir muss gehen unsere Boot. Wir bleiben und bikples, a Festland gehen.*
 TP: *Mipela mas go bot bilong mipela. Mipela stap na go bikples.*
 E: We must go to our boat. We stayed for while and then we went to the mainland.

Text 2 Speaker Camila, Ali Island 1973. This text gives the impression of an independently developed German. The speaker learned German from German Sisters in a mission kitchen:

- PG: *Früher ich war Alexishafen. Ich gut arbeiten. Ich war noch klein. Ich gehen. Ich dann bleiben. Dann ich grosse Mädchen. Dann ich arbeiten. Planti work. Ich hauskuk bleiben. Dann ich arbeiten gut. Ich gut kochen. Dann zu Hause kommen. Dann ich kommen, dann bleiben, dann heiraten. Ich heiraten.*
 E: Earlier I was Alexishafen. I well work. I was still small. I go. I then stay. Then I big girl. Then I work. Plenty work. I cook stay. Then I work well. I well cook. Then at home come. Then I come, then stay, then marry. I marry.

Note the use of infinitive verb forms, the lack of tense and aspect markers and the variable word order in both texts. Next to such pidgin forms of German, there was also one creolized form of German which developed among the mixed race children at the orphanage at Vunapope at the end of the last century. It is interesting to note that these children appear to have possessed no full knowledge of any language on their arrival. Janssen (1932) reports:

The mission could not remain indifferent to the sad plight of these children. It began to collect them and when their numbers continued to grow it founded its own institution in 1897 where they were to be educated by the sisters. Now that was a really difficult enterprise. The whites are generally ignorant of the natives' language and in conversation with them make use of

pidgin English, the workers' language, which is a mixture of corrupted English and native dialects. The halfcastes mostly speak only this pidgin English with a few bits of native language heard from their mother, which of course differs according to the home. On their arrival at the mission station they are therefore hardly able to make themselves understood (author's translation).

This "pidgin English" refers to Tok Pisin which at the time was still a very rudimentary language.

What does not emerge from this quotation is that the children were not only of mixed German—Tolai and other New Guinean parentage but also of Trukese, Chinese, Guamese, Filipino and other origins. At the mission school the students were taught High German and must have acquired at least the rudiments of this language. It is very difficult indeed to find fluent speakers of High German among the mixed race community. Rather, High German appears to have remained a functionally and structurally restricted school language, comparable to English in many Papua New Guinea classrooms. In the dormitories, on the other hand, a pidginized German began to develop among the pupils. It has predominantly German vocabulary and its close structural similarity with Tok Pisin suggests that, as Volker (1982) suspects, some relexification was involved. The Australian occupation of Rabaul and German New Guinea in 1914 caused a number of changes at the Vunapope school and mission settlement, among them the serious weakening of German as a target language. These changes are characterized by Volker (1982) as follows:

In the mid-1920s, at the same time the school was absorbing a large number of these new students, the new government complicated the linguistic situation by decreeing that the Vunapope school would have to switch from using German as a teaching medium to using English. This change was as hard for the German

teachers as it was for the students, as many of them knew only school English. German was therefore still used for many years as an emergency language when an English explanation was not understood or proved to be too complicated. In some subjects, such as mathematics, explanations were normally in English, while the text was in German. At this time the students were divided into two groups, those of mixed-race European background and those of other backgrounds. All students received one lesson of German grammar and handwriting a week. Special emphasis was placed on this lesson with the part-European group. Outside the school German was used nearly always; 'Unserdeutsch' among the students and with the now adult former students and their families, who tended to settle near the mission, and 'Normaldeutsch' with the missionaries. German was also used in many church activities (even some Tolai choirs were taught German Christmas carols!) and in the work shops where the teenage boys were apprenticed. English was rarely used at the mission outside the classroom.

The last passage suggests that *Unserdeutsch* has become the home language of a small community within a single generation. It also underlines the continued existence of an *Unserdeutsch-Normaldeutsch* (the latter used for speaking with missionaries and religious purposes) diglossia, comparable to a pidgin/creole-superordinate language diglossia in many similar settings (e.g. Afrikaans of Rehobot Basters vs official Dutch, creole vs French in Haiti and Reunion). After independence of Papua New Guinea in 1976 most of the mixed race speakers moved to Queensland where they appear to have merged with the English speaking population. Next to pidgin and creole varieties of German in New Guinea, there was an incipient settler's koiné characterised mainly by lexical borrowings from Tok Pisin such as *vaiten* < *paitim* 'to hit' and English.

The role of German and all the former German colonies today is very weak. Most problematic is the absence of high school and university courses in German that would enable the local population to read the very considerable number of untranslated German publications dealing with their past.

Another reminder of the former German presence in the Pacific are a number of topographical names such as the ones in Papua New Guinea: Finschhafen, Alexishafen and Sattelberg, but over the years most German names have been replaced by English or indigenous ones as in:

| | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Adolf Hafen | Morobe Harbor |
| Angriffshafen | Vanimu |
| Herbertshoehe | Kokopo |
| Kaiserin Augusta Fluss | Sepik |
| Neu-Lauenburg | Duke-of-York Islands |
| Neupommern | New Britain |
| Kaiser Wilhelmsland | North East New Guinea |

Renewed contacts between speakers of Pacific languages and speakers of German have occurred as a consequence of mass tourism, development aid projects and overseas study. German missionaries continue to be numerous in Papua New Guinea and a reunified Germany may well wish to promote the study of its culture and language in the Pacific area.

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Relevant map

Dutch and German in the Pacific area. Compiled by Peter Mühlhäusler. Map 41.