

# Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German), Papua New Guinea

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## 1 Introduction and historical background

Papua New Guinea, with a population of around 8 million has 841 living languages, more than any other country in the world (see Lewis et al. 2018). Unserdeutsch (also known as Rabaul Creole German), the only known German-based creole language in the world, arose in this multilingual environment among mixed-race<sup>1</sup> children of an orphanage at the Vunapope Catholic Mission in what was then German New Guinea. Since the independence of Papua New Guinea from Australia in 1975, virtually all speakers have emigrated to Australia. Unserdeutsch is therefore not only the only known German-based creole language, but will soon be the first language of Papua New Guinea to become extinct because of emigration overseas. It is also one of a small subset of creole languages whose genesis can be traced to a boarding school. Until recently there was little available documentation of the language, but an Unserdeutsch Documentation Project at the University of Augsburg is currently making much more data available to scholars and the community itself than was previously available (see Maitz et al. 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Although pejorative in many other varieties of English, in Papua New Guinea ‘mixed-race’ (in Tok Pisin *hapkas*, from English ‘half-caste’) is a neutral word used to describe persons of mixed ethnic background, even persons with two or more indigenous heritages. With this in mind and out of respect to the emic prevalence of ‘mixed-race’ by Unserdeutsch speakers themselves, it is used here.



Map 1 Vunapope and Rabaul in Papua New Guinea

## 1.1 German New Guinea

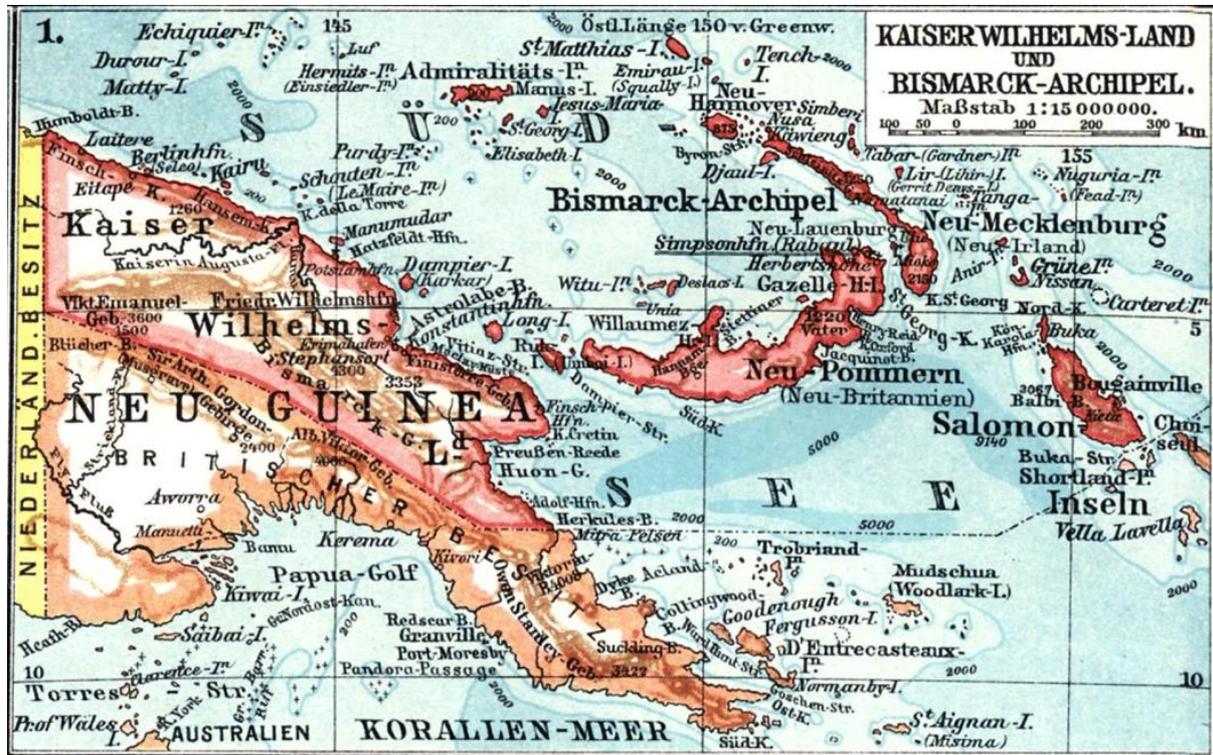
The number of actual Germans in German New Guinea was never large, and many German and other non-indigenous men had marriages or other relations with local women. In 1897, missionaries opened a ‘sanctuary’ and school for mixed-race and Asian children at the Vunapope Catholic Mission on the Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain (then called Neupommern).

The children came from a wide variety of Melanesian, European, and Asian backgrounds. Every effort was made to keep them away from the ‘vile habits’ (Janssen 1932: 150, author’s translation) of their indigenous relatives and to inculcate them with European habits. Few of the children spoke any German when they arrived at the orphanage. Those old enough to speak usually did speak Tok Pisin (New Guinea Pidgin English) in addition to ‘a few phrases’ (Janssen 1932: 150) of their mother’s language, but they were not allowed to use either at school.

At this late date, it is not possible to know exactly how the language came into being. Students used German with their teachers all day long and most developed a good command of both spoken and written Standard German by the time they left the orphanage. Older speakers interviewed in 1979 said that their parents had told them that at night the first generation of children would joke and pass time by telling stories using sentences with German vocabulary but strongly influenced by Tok Pisin grammar (see Volker 1991: 46). There is evidence of intense SLA effects at play in the formation of Unserdeutsch (see Maitz 2016: 216f). The core features of the basilect stabilised quite early, and it quickly became a marker of group identity that set the group apart against an adult outer world that was not always hospitable and often racist (see Volker 1989: 22). Unlike most other pidgin and creole languages, Unserdeutsch was never used as a medium for wider inter-ethnic communication.

When children became teenagers and were ready to leave the orphanage, nuns would match them with other teenagers at the orphanage for marriage. Their children were the first generation to grow up with Unserdeutsch as a home language. Many of these children were

boarding students at Vunapope like their parents had been. They were joined by both new mixed-race children taken, often without their mothers' permission, by missionaries and Asian children sent to study at the school as boarding or day students. After the first generation, the speech community was therefore always composed of a core for whom the language was a home language and those who learned it as a second language.



Map 2 Map of German New Guinea (Brockhaus 1911)

## 1.2 Australian New Guinea

Australia entered World War I by invading the German colony in 1914. Under Australian rule, as in Australia itself at this time, missionaries were allowed to take any mixed-race children they found into their care, even if those children were in stable family relationships. This meant that the number of children at the Vunapope schools, and therefore the number of Unserdeutsch speakers, increased during the interwar years.

The German Catholic missionaries themselves were allowed to remain, but all teaching at the Vunapope schools except for German language lessons was to be in English. German remained the principal language among non-indigenous staff on the Mission, where a number of mixed-race families had their homes. For those Unserdeutsch speakers living on plantations, life remained isolated, and social life tended to be with family and other mixed-race persons, usually in Unserdeutsch.

During World War II, it was prohibited to speak German in the presence of the Japanese occupiers. In the course of the war, however, the community together with the missionaries were brought to Ramale valley, a prisoner of war camp, where they were left on their own and nobody cared about them speaking German and Unserdeutsch. When the war ended and Australian rule was reinstated, the Australian administration made a strong effort to use the school system to tie the colony more closely to Australia (Megarrity 2005: 3). The use of German at the Vunapope schools, either in class or in dormitories, was prohibited, and teachers went to mixed-race families to urge them to use only English at home. Beginning in

the 1960s, older children tended to go to boarding schools in Australia, further disrupting inter-generational language transmission.

### **1.3 Unserdeutsch today**

As Papua New Guinean independence approached in 1975, most Unserdeutsch-speaking families opted to move to Australia in the years before and immediately after independence. In fieldwork between 2014 and 2017, about 100 speakers and semi-speakers could be found in Australia, and less than 10 in Papua New Guinea itself. The very youngest semi-speakers were in their mid-50s, with the youngest fluent speakers in their late 60s. Unserdeutsch is now moribund and likely to become extinct by the middle of this century (see Maitz and Volker 2017: 384ff).

## **2 Socio-historical and sociolinguistic aspects**

### **2.1 ‘Mixed-race’ identity**

To understand the position of the first Unserdeutsch speakers, it is necessary to understand ‘mixed-race’ in colonial New Guinea. Both German and Australian New Guinea were extremely racially stratified. The relatively well educated mixed-race communities were in a position above the indigenous majority but below the European elite, facing much official and social prejudice. Older speakers interviewed in 1979 and 1980 related that by using their own variety of German, they were able to establish an in-group identity that was of Melanesia but clearly German.

In a questionnaire during fieldwork, Unserdeutsch speakers in Australia were asked to describe their ethnic identity. While most said they were Australian citizens, few described themselves as ‘Australian’ and none as ‘German’. Most said they were ‘mixed-race’, ‘mixed-race German’, or ‘PNG mixed-race’. But while their mixed-race identity remains important, it is now in the absence of the overt prejudice and barriers of the past. A linguistic buffer against a racist outer world is no longer necessary.

### **2.2 Language ecologies**

It is important to remember that there have never been monolingual speakers of Unserdeutsch, and the language was never the medium for all registers of communication. Unserdeutsch speakers have always also been fluent in the language(s) of education (Standard German and/or English) and Tok Pisin, with a few individuals having some knowledge of other languages. Code switching and the use of more than one language in a conversation have always been normal.

Their extensive linguistic repertoire is not unusual in the multilingual Gazelle Peninsula of New Britain, an area dominated by the Kuanua language of the Tolai people. Since the earliest colonial times, it has also been a mixing pot for both indigenous and immigrant outsiders. In addition to Unserdeutsch, it was the place where early forms of Melanesian Pidgin English were introduced into German New Guinea and developed into Tok Pisin (see Mosel 1980) and where a local Chinese koine or creole developed among Chinese immigrants speaking a variety of Chinese languages (see Cahill 2012). There was formerly also a sizeable ‘Malay’ community from Ambon.

Unserdeutsch speakers seemed to have used mostly Tok Pisin with Tolais even though at least one third of the interviewed speakers reported a parent who spoke Kuanua. Similarly,

although most said that their indigenous background was from New Ireland Province, no one living in 2016 could speak a New Ireland language, and few reported a parent who could.

All did report that their parents and grandparents spoke Tok Pisin. Therefore, although the first instances of the creolisation of Tok Pisin are usually reported to be after World War II (e.g., Mühlhäusler 2003: 4) or even later (e.g., Slobin 2002: 386), it seems the first generation of Unserdeutsch speakers was actually also the first generation of speakers of Tok Pisin as a native language. This undoubtedly was a factor in the development of a creolised version of German.

With the Australian invasion of the colony in 1914, English became the official language of instruction at the school. At the time of the Australian takeover, even the oldest Unserdeutsch speakers would still have been young adults. This means that as English became increasingly important in interactions with Australian colonial officials and business people, all Unserdeutsch speakers developed a good command of the new colonial language.

In Australia today, English monolingualism has become the norm among the descendants of Unserdeutsch speakers. In interviews in 2016, few Unserdeutsch speakers reported living near other speakers or using Unserdeutsch in daily life. This isolation and the quite different language histories of different families before moving to Australia mean that there is much variation among individual speakers.

### **2.3 Language attitudes**

At the same time that the move to Australia has completed the breakdown of intergenerational language transmission, the official multiculturalism policy of the Australian government has helped foster an environment where Unserdeutsch speakers no longer need to be ashamed of their language. In earlier days, Unserdeutsch speakers were ridiculed for speaking 'broken German' (*kaputtene Deutsch*). Later, after World War II, they were criticised for burdening their children with an unnecessary 'foreign' language. This negative pressure from the outside resulted in a feeling of shame towards the language. This was obvious in fieldwork in 1979 and 1980, when speakers would often be unwilling to share basilectal registers with outsiders.

Today speakers are much more willing to share their language with outside researchers and even to be interviewed speaking Unserdeutsch for the government-sponsored multicultural SBS television station or in a drama production (Unger 2009). There is a community Facebook page with a few postings in Unserdeutsch using an English-based ad hoc orthography. Undoubtedly, recent fieldwork by the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Project team has acted as a catalyst in this increased awareness in the community, even among semi-speakers and non-speakers of Unserdeutsch, of the unique status of Unserdeutsch.

### **2.4 Prospects for the future**

An increased awareness in their language has not yet resulted in any move to revitalise the language among younger generations, although a majority of speakers reported feeling 'sad' that Unserdeutsch was not being passed on. Emphasis among language activists has focussed on the need to document the language and history of the community.

While these activities will undoubtedly strengthen community solidarity, they are unlikely to help the language survive. The extent of speakers' linguistic isolation is shown by the comment of one speaker still living in Papua New Guinea with a good command of both Unserdeutsch and Standard German. When asked how he has maintained fluency in languages he can rarely use with others, he answered that he speaks in German to his flowers every morning, since only they will ever understand him.

### 3 Phonology

Unserdeutsch is still poorly described. To date the only work dealing with the phonology of Unserdeutsch has been the sketch in Volker (1982: 18–29), which has been used unchanged in recent analyses by Klein (2006) and Velupillai (2015). These need to be revisited. The linguistic data in this chapter are from fieldwork undertaken in Australia and Papua New Guinea between 2014 and 2016 as the first stage of the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Project. Earlier data have not been used in these descriptions because our purpose here is to describe the current state of basilectal speech and to avoid the problem of speakers with formal education in Standard German (common until World War II and therefore among speakers recorded in 1979 and 1980) trying to hide basilect (‘incorrect’) forms from outsider researchers. Persons interested in comparing the results in this description with data from the earlier fieldwork may wish to consult recordings from that earlier fieldwork now available on the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Documentation Project website.

Researchers in both the fields of creole studies and language typologies have tended to generalise that creole languages on the whole have a relatively small phoneme inventory, at least in comparison with their lexifier languages (see McWhorter 2001). It is also assumed that creole languages tend to do away with typologically unusual or marked vowels and consonants present in their lexifier languages. The first of these generalisations has been seriously questioned in recent years (see, e.g., Klein 2006 and Vellupillai 2015). Nevertheless, in the case of Unserdeutsch both of these tendencies are present.

#### 3.1 Vowel inventory

The segmental phonological system of Unserdeutsch is for the most part based on that of its substrate language, Tok Pisin (see Laycock 1985). This is particularly noticeable in the vowel system. Like Tok Pisin (see Laycock 1985), basilectal Unserdeutsch has a five-vowel system (see Figure 1), consisting of five short vowels. With the exception of [ɛ], these have different qualities than the short vowels of the lexifier language, Standard German.

|                        | front | central | back |
|------------------------|-------|---------|------|
| closed                 | i     |         | u    |
| mid                    | ɛ     |         | o    |
| open                   |       | a       |      |
| diphthongs: au, ɔɛ, aɔ |       |         |      |

Figure 1: The vowel system (phoneme candidates) of Unserdeutsch

As Figure 1 shows, the vowel inventory of basilectal Unserdeutsch is considerably smaller than that of its lexifier language. None of the long vowels of Standard German is present. Similarly, there is a clear tendency for the typologically highly marked rounded (umlaut) vowels of Standard German to be represented by equivalents that are partially or completely delabialised:

|                   |           |                         |
|-------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| [ʃiten]           | ‘to pour’ | (SGER <i>schütten</i> ) |
| [tsurik]          | ‘back’    | (SGER <i>zurück</i> )   |
| [tswɛlf]/[tswølf] | ‘twelve’  | (SGER <i>zwölf</i> )    |
| [grɛsɛɛ]          | ‘bigger’  | (SGER <i>größere</i> )  |

On the whole, the short vowels in Unserdeutsch have qualities identical to the Standard German long vowels. The Standard German short vowels [ʊ], [ɔ], [ʏ], [œ], [ɪ], not present in Tok Pisin, are replaced with near equivalents in the five-short vowel system.

Two other Standard German vowels that are not present in basilectal Unserdeutsch are the reduced vowels found in unstressed syllables ([ə] and [ɐ]). Standard German words with these vowels usually have [ɛ] in Unserdeutsch.

The production of individual vowels shows significant inter- and intra-personal variation, both in the vocal quality and quantity, especially in the production of words which have an umlaut vowel in Standard German and which have been delabialised in Unserdeutsch. Even in the speech of one individual speaker, there are different but apparently not phonologically distinctive degrees of delabialisation between [i] and [y] and between [ø] and [ɛ]. This variation appears to be conditioned at least in part on independent lexemes. Variation in both the degree of openness and the vowel quantity also can be observed without being phonologically distinctive. Fully long vowels, however, are infrequent. This variation seems to be less a matter of distribution or attrition than of the lack of any generally accepted norms of pronunciation and the subsequent tolerance of variation that comes from different individual and family language histories, contact with and degree of convergence of the three phonological systems in individual speakers' linguistic repertoire, as well as from some degree of lexical conditioning.

The five-member vowel system described here differs significantly from the nine-member system that was described for Unserdeutsch by Volker (1982), who postulated two rows of vowel phonemes differing from each other according to the feature of openness. A certain amount of this kind of distinction in the degree of openness can be seen at the phonetic level, but these distinctions do not appear to be phonemically relevant, as they can appear in the same distribution. It is important to correct this earlier report as this phonological description has been used several times as evidence against the assumption that creole languages are phonologically simple. In Klein's (2006) sample of 23 creole languages, the nine-vowel system described by Volker for Unserdeutsch is the most complex vowel system of all. In contrast, the five-vowel system described here allows us to place Unserdeutsch among those creole languages Klein lists with the smallest vowel inventory.

### **3.2 Consonant inventory**

With a very few exceptions, the consonant inventory of Unserdeutsch is also identical to that of Tok Pisin (see Figure 2).

|                     | Labial |    | Dental / Alveolar |    | Postalveolar |    | Palatal |    | Velar |    | Glottal |    |
|---------------------|--------|----|-------------------|----|--------------|----|---------|----|-------|----|---------|----|
|                     | vl.    | v. | vl.               | v. | vl.          | v. | vl.     | v. | vl.   | v. | vl.     | v. |
| Plosive             | p      | b  | t                 | d  |              |    |         |    | k     | g  |         |    |
| Nasal               |        | m  |                   | n  |              |    |         |    |       | ŋ  |         |    |
| Fricative           | f      | v  | s                 |    | ʃ            |    | (ç)     |    | (χ)   |    | h       |    |
| Approximant         |        |    |                   |    |              |    |         | j  |       |    |         |    |
| Lateral approximant |        |    |                   | l  |              |    |         |    |       |    |         |    |
| Affricate           | pf     |    | ts                |    |              |    | tʃ      |    |       |    |         |    |
| Rhotic              |        |    |                   | r  |              |    |         |    |       |    |         |    |

Figure 2: The consonant system (phoneme candidates) of Unserdeutsch  
(vl = voiceless, v = voiced)

Only three clear differences between the two systems stand out. Like its lexifier language, Unserdeutsch has two voiceless fricatives – [f] and [ʃ] – that do not appear as individual phonemes in most varieties of non-urban Tok Pisin. Similarly, like Standard German, Unserdeutsch has the (peripheral) affricate [tʃ], as in the word [dɔɐ̯tʃ] ‘German’. All other consonants present in Standard German but not in Tok Pisin, are absent and/or substituted.

Standard German has three allophones in free variation for a phoneme normally written <r>: [ʀ], [ʁ], and [r]. To a large extent these are regional variants. With the exception of one speaker, Unserdeutsch speakers were observed using only [r], which unlike [ʀ] and [ʁ], is also present in Tok Pisin.

|                |            |   |
|----------------|------------|---|
| [riti]/[riçti] | ‘right’    | (SGER <i>richtig</i> )  |
| [briŋɛn]       | ‘to bring’ | (SGER <i>bringen</i> )  |
| [saltsvaser]   | ‘sea’      | (SGER <i>Salz</i> ‘salt’ + SGER <i>Wasser</i> ‘water’, a calque of TP <i>solwara</i> , from English ‘salt water’) |

Where Standard German has the allophones [ç] and [χ] in complementary distribution (both normally written <ch>), corresponding Unserdeutsch words have [h] in word medial onset positions:

|          |           |                        |
|----------|-----------|------------------------|
| [mahɛn]  | ‘to make’ | (SGER <i>machen</i> )  |
| [methɛn] | ‘girl’    | (SGER <i>Mädchen</i> ) |

In coda positions however, corresponding Unserdeutsch words tend to have no consonant in most cases. In a few cases, the consonant is present but often with reduced articulation:

|                |         |   |
|----------------|---------|---|
| [riti]/[riçti] | ‘right’ | (SGER <i>richtig</i> )                  |
| [i]            | ‘I’     | (SGER <i>ich</i> )                      |
| [ta]/[taχ]     | ‘day’   | (SGER <i>Tag</i> , Northern SGER [taχ]) |

The Standard German affricate [ts] is for the most part present in corresponding Unserdeutsch words, but is (especially in onset position) often deaffricated so that only its fricative element is present:

|           |               |                         |
|-----------|---------------|-------------------------|
| [plats]   | ‘place, home’ | (SGER <i>Platz</i> )    |
| [tsurik]  | ‘back’        | (SGER <i>zurück</i> )   |
| [susamen] | ‘together’    | (SGER <i>zusammen</i> ) |
| [su]      | ‘to’          | (SGER <i>zu</i> )       |

The same is true for the labial affricate [pf]:

|           |              |                          |
|-----------|--------------|--------------------------|
| [kopf]    | ‘head’       | (SGER <i>Kopf</i> )      |
| [flansun] | ‘plantation’ | (SGER <i>Pflanzung</i> ) |

Except for words of English origin, the Standard German voiced fricative [z] does not appear in Unserdeutsch. Corresponding Unserdeutsch words have a voiceless [s], which unlike [z], is present in Tok Pisin:

|           |            |                         |
|-----------|------------|-------------------------|
| [susamen] | ‘together’ | (SGER <i>zusammen</i> ) |
| [disɛ]    | ‘this’     | (SGER <i>diese</i> )    |

Standard German [v] is also present in the speech of most speakers. However, in most cases it can be substituted by and also realised as [w], resulting in two free variant allophones. This substitution may have been caused by substrate transfer from Tok Pisin as well as subsequent adstrate transfer from English (see Volker 1982: 26–27):

|                    |                   |                          |
|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| [etvas]/[etwas]    | ‘something, some’ | (SGER <i>etwas</i> )     |
| [ʃwester]/[ʃvestɛ] | ‘sister’          | (SGER <i>Schwester</i> ) |

### 3.3 Typological profile

From a phonological typology framework of word and syllable languages (see Auer 2001), basilectal Unserdeutsch is quite the opposite of its lexifier language (see Szczepaniak 2007) and very much like the vast majority of pidgin and creole languages in being a language with strong and dominant syllable language characteristics. This means that in basilectal Unserdeutsch the prosodic domain of the syllable is of central importance. This is unlike word languages, in which the prosodic domain of the word is of central importance. Looking at the data and comparing them with available results from other Germanic languages and varieties (see, e.g., Nübling and Schrambke 2004), the distinctive syllable language character of the language is quite noticeable. Unserdeutsch is probably the German variety with the most marked syllable language features. This appears most certainly to be a contact-induced phenomenon that can be traced to fundamental phonological substrate transfer from Tok Pisin, which has even stronger syllable language characteristics. A systematic typological analysis of the phonology of Unserdeutsch is not possible here, but three of the most noticeable syllable language characteristics will be briefly discussed.

First of all, basilectal Unserdeutsch is characterised by a preference for rather less complex syllable codas. In the simplification of complex syllable codas in words from the lexifier language, vowel epenthesis does not, in contrast to Tok Pisin, seem to play an important role. Instead, there is a strong tendency for syllable final consonants to be deleted, leading to a clear preference for CVC and CV syllable structures:

|         |                 |                           |
|---------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| [filæ̃] | ‘perhaps’       | (SGER <i>vielleicht</i> ) |
| [sa]    | ‘(she/he) says’ | (SGER <i>sagt</i> )       |
| [aben]  | ‘evening’       | (SGER <i>Abend</i> )      |

Secondly, in contrast to Standard German, basilectal Unserdeutsch has a rather symmetrical vowel distribution in stressed and unstressed syllables, without the vowel reduction common in Standard German unstressed syllables. While Standard German unstressed syllables have schwa, corresponding Unserdeutsch syllables usually have [ɛ] or, less frequently, [e] or [ɛr]:

|                    |           |                                    |
|--------------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| [mutɛr]/[mutɛ]     | ‘mother’  | (SGER <i>Mutter</i> )              |
| [ʃwestɛr]/[ʃvestɛ] | ‘sister’  | (SGER <i>Schwester</i> )           |
| [hɛrɛmal]          | ‘husband’ | (SGER archaic <i>Herr Gemahl</i> ) |

Finally, the differences in vowel quantity between stressed and unstressed syllables are also levelled out through a noticeable tendency for contrasting vowel quantities to be eliminated. The equivalents of Standard German long vowels tend to be half long or in most cases completely shortened:

|          |           |                        |
|----------|-----------|------------------------|
| [methɛn] | ‘girl’    | (SGER <i>Mädchen</i> ) |
| [lɛbɛn]  | ‘life’    | (SGER <i>Leben</i> )   |
| [libɛn]  | ‘to love’ | (SGER <i>lieben</i> )  |

As a result of these tendencies, the weight of stressed and unstressed syllables is fairly symmetrical as it only differs to the extent that, with some exceptions, diphthongs do mostly, but not exclusively, appear in stressed syllables.

### 3.4 Stress

While the segmental structure of basilectal Unserdeutsch shows an unambiguous substrate influence, the prosody shows the exact opposite influence of the lexifier language. The accent rules in Unserdeutsch are for the most part identical to those of Standard German. Word accent is usually morphologically conditioned, with accent falling on the first syllable of the root, which may be, but is not necessarily, the first syllable of the word. In certain cases, whether for morphological reasons or because the word is of non-German origin, this basic principle is not followed, and the accent is in a different position. When this is morphologically conditioned (such as with phrasal verbs), accent is in the same position as in Standard German. In words of non-German origin, accent follows the rules of the relevant source language. From a typological perspective, word accent in Unserdeutsch can therefore be considered free, as it can in principle fall on any syllable.

## 4 Grammar

In the absence of any written as well as spoken prescriptive norms in the community, there is a certain amount of variation in the grammar of Unserdeutsch speakers, not only between families, but also within the speech of any one speaker (see Maitz 2017). It is far beyond the scope of this brief overview to give a detailed description of Unserdeutsch morphology and syntax, much less to describe the extent of this morphosyntactic variation and the motivations and environments governing it. This is an important goal of the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Project, but that analysis is still ongoing. Here we will look at core features that form the common basis of the grammar of basilectal Unserdeutsch and that are present to

some extent in the speech of even acrolectal speakers, whose speech shows the greatest structural proximity to Standard German. Overall, the grammar of Unserdeutsch can be explained as a blend of elements from German, English and Tok Pisin grammar with clear signs of L2 simplification processes having taken place (see Lindenfelser and Maitz 2017).

#### 4.1 Inflection

In respect of both the inventory of grammatical categories and marking strategies, the inflectional system of Unserdeutsch exhibits a higher degree of similarity to Tok Pisin, English as well as high contact L2 varieties of German than to Standard German. There is a clear preference for analytic marking. Only a handful of synthetic markers exist, all but one of which are suffixes. Thus, from a typological perspective basilectal Unserdeutsch shows strong isolating tendencies.

##### 4.1.1 Nouns

Unlike Standard German, Unserdeutsch does not show grammatical gender or case distinctions on nouns. Usually there is no marking on the noun for plural. Instead, plurality is usually indicated by the pronominal plural marker *alle* (see 1a), in form identical with the Standard German indefinite pronoun *alle* ‘all’, but with the meaning of its near cognate, the Tok Pisin plural marker *ol*. If plurality is already indicated by a preceding numeral or an indefinite pronoun, *alle* does not occur (see 1b). Even in the basilect, some nouns, especially high frequency nouns, may retain Standard German synthetic plural markers and are therefore marked twice (see 2).

- |     |   |                                       |
|-----|---|---------------------------------------|
| (1) | a. Plural with <i>alle</i>                      | <i>alle knabe</i> ‘boys’ <sup>2</sup> |
|     | b. Plural with numeral                          | <i>einige mensch</i> ‘some people’    |
| (2) | a. Plural with <i>alle</i> and SGER plural form | <i>alle frau-en</i> ‘women’           |
|     | b. Plural with numeral and SGER plural form     | <i>drei jahr-e</i> ‘three years’      |

Definiteness and indefiniteness of nouns are marked by articles or pronouns quite obligatory.

##### 4.1.2 Verbs

Verbs in basilectal Unserdeutsch are usually not inflected for person and number. These categories are marked analytically on the subject. An exception to this is the copula *sein*, which is usually, but not by all speakers, conjugated in a similar way as in Standard German. Uninflected copulas have the default form *bis* < SGER 2.P.SG. *bis(t)*. Otherwise, verbs of German origin remain generally uninflected. Their default form is identical with the Standard German infinitive such as *lachen* ‘laugh’ and *singen* ‘sing’ with the suffix *-en* as a verb marker. Different patterns can be found in a closed group of basic and high frequency verbs only, which have either the Standard German third person singular form, such as *geht* ‘go’ or *will* ‘want’, or the pure verb root, such as *bleib* ‘stay’ or *arbeit* ‘work’. Transitive verbs of Tok Pisin or English but not those of German origin usually have the Tok Pisin transitive suffix *-im*, such as *steamim* ‘steam (sth.)’, *adoptim* ‘adopt (sb.)’.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples are given in the orthography used in the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Research Project, with words of German origin written in a modified Standard German orthography and other words usually written as in English or Tok Pisin. As in English and Tok Pisin, but unlike Standard German, initial letters of common nouns are written in lower case. The letters <ss> are used instead of <ß> and <e> instead of <ä>.

Overt past tense is optionally marked with an analytic past tense construction using the uninflected auxiliary *hat* ‘have’ (sometimes *hab*) and a past participle (see 3). Participles are formed with the prefix *ge-* plus the Unserdeutsch default verb form, e.g., *gesprehen* ‘spoken’ (SGER *gesprochen*), *gefragen* ‘asked’ (SGER *gefragt*). Participles of verbs of English and/or Tok Pisin origin are usually prefixed in the same way, e.g. *geboilen* ‘boiled’, *geringen* ‘called (sb.)’ or *gekotim* ‘sued (sb.)’.

- (3) a. *Wi hat ge-heirat-en, orait, wi hat ge-geht ...*  
 1PL AUX.PST PTCP-marry-V all\_right 1PL AUX.PST PTCP-go  
 ‘We got married, all right, (then) we went away ...’ (TP *orait* ‘all right’)
- b. *I geht zurick zu Rabaul eighty-two.*  
 1SG go back to Rabaul eighty-two  
 ‘I went back to Rabaul in 1982.’

Apart from this pattern in past tense marking, which is the only productive one, a closed class of high-frequency verbs has deviating forms inherited from Standard German. The modal verbs, the copula, and the verb *weiss* ‘to know’ retained the synthetic simple past (preterite) forms from Standard German, although not conjugated for number or person, e.g., *musste* ‘had to’, *wollte* ‘wanted to’, and *wusste* ‘knew’. Another closed class of verbs has retained the Standard German past perfect forms with the auxiliary *war* ‘was’: *war geboren* ‘was born’, *war gestorben* ‘had died’, *war gekommen* ‘had come’ (apart from regular *hat gekomm*), and *war gegangen* ‘had gone’ (apart from regular *hat gegeht*). However, these simple past and past perfect forms are clearly lexicalised and non-productive. Since their occurrence is frequency based and lexically conditioned, we can conclude that the only productive and regular way of past tense marking is the construction *hat* + past participle.

Unserdeutsch has one single weakly grammaticalised future tense. It is marked by the auxiliary *wit* ‘will/become’ (< SGER 3.P.SG. form *wird*) plus default verb form (see 4). Its realisation is facultative just as in spoken Standard German and in Tok Pisin.

- (4) *Du wit seh-n Freddy morgen!*  
 2SG AUX.FUT see-V Freddy tomorrow  
 ‘You will see Freddy tomorrow!’

The aspect system of Unserdeutsch is quite complex. There are two grammaticalised constructions to express aspectual meaning, and their use is largely obligatory. The first one is formed similarly to the German so-called *am*-progressive by the copula, an aspect particle *am* and the default verb form. It may express progressive and/or habitual aspect (see 5).

- (5) a. *Sie is am lah-en!*  
 3SG.F COP.3SG PROG laugh-V  
 ‘She is laughing!’
- b. *Ich war immer am koch-en au, wann i war mehr gröss-e.*  
 1SG COP.PST always HAB cook-V too when 1SG COP.PST more big\COM-COM  
 ‘I was always cooking, too, when I was bigger.’

Alternatively, habitual action in the past can be marked by a construction with auxiliary *wit* plus default verb form (see 6), showing an apparent formal and functional analogy to the English habitual past construction with the auxiliary *would*.

- (6) *Du wit aufsteh-n am morgen viellei so sechs, fünf uhr.*  
 2SG AUX.HAB get\_up-V at morning maybe about six five o'clock  
 'You would (always) get up in the morning maybe about six, five o'clock.'

Sometimes, the *wit*-construction is even used in past narratives about single events (see 7).

- (7) *Nach zwei monat i wit sag-en Alois Akun dass i wit geht ferien.*  
 after two month 1SG AUX say-V Alois Akun that 1SG AUX go holiday  
 'After two months I told Alois Akun that I would go on holidays.'

Furthermore, this polyfunctional *wit*-construction is also used to express an irrealis mode (see 8 and 34). Conditionals, occurring rather rarely in our data, are also formed in this way (see 9).

- (8) *Jetzt i wit ni leb-en in New Guinea.*  
 now 1SG AUX.IRR not live-V in New Guinea  
 'Now (nowadays) I would not live in New Guinea.'
- (9) *Viellei wenn i ni komm su Australia fi schule, viellei wi wit  
 ni hat diese leben.*  
 maybe if 1SG not come to Australia for school maybe 1PL AUX.IRR  
 not have this life  
 'Maybe, if we had not come to Australia for school, we maybe would not have this  
 (kind of) life.'

Unlike its substrate language Tok Pisin, Unserdeutsch allows for a passive construction (see 10), although it is very rarely used. Even in acrolectal speech, its appearance is marginal. It is formed by the copula *war* plus the participle of the main verb, similarly to the English passive construction, but also to the Standard German statal passive. If the agent is named, it is most likely connected by the preposition *von* 'by', however, this happens even more rarely due to a clear preference for active sentences.

- (10) *In diese sorte zeit viele dings war nich ge-spreh-en von.*  
 in this sort time many things AUX.PST not PTCP-speak-V about  
 'In this sort of time, many things were not spoken about.'

#### 4.1.3 Adjectives

Adjectives in Unserdeutsch show no differentiation for gender, case, or number, as adjectives do in Standard German noun phrases. However, while they remain unmarked in predicative and adverbial use (see 11), an obligatory attributive marker *-e* is attached in attributive use (see 12).

- (11) *I warten bis die etwas gross.*  
 1SG wait until 3PL somewhat big  
 'I waited until they were somewhat bigger.'
- (12) *I bis eine gross-e medhen.*  
 1SG COP ART.INDF big-ATTR girl  
 'I am a big girl.'

Comparative and superlative adjectives show different forms. Two high-frequency adjectives retained their suppletive forms from the lexifier language:

- (13) a. *gut* ‘good’ – *besse(r)* ‘better’ – *beste* ‘best’  
 b. *viel* ‘much/many’ – *mehr* ‘more’ – *meiste* ‘most’

Apart from these, only a very limited set of basic adjectives is commonly used with Standard German-like synthetic comparatives and superlatives:

- (14) a. *alt* ‘old’ – *elter* ‘older’ – *elteste* ‘oldest’  
 b. *gross* ‘big’ – *grösse(r)* ‘bigger’ – *grösste* ‘biggest’  
 c. *klein* ‘small’ – *kleiner* ‘smaller’ – *kleinste* ‘smallest’  
 d. *jung* ‘young’ – *junger/jünger* ‘younger’ – *jungste/jüngste/jingste* ‘youngest’

Beyond these mostly lexically conditioned cases, the comparative is mostly marked analytically by the particle *mehr* ‘more’ (see 15). In certain cases, the redundant use of both the analytic and the synthetic marking can be observed (see 5b and 16). If the comparison element is mentioned, it is more probably linked by *dann* ‘than/as’ than by its Standard German-like functional equivalent *als* ‘than/as’. However, as in Tok Pisin, adjectival comparisons are obviously avoided by most speakers and often replaced by periphrastic constructions such as (11).

- (15) a. *mehr dunkel than me*  
 more dark than 1SG.ACC  
 ‘darker than me’  
 b. *ferti mehr snell*  
 finished more fast  
 ‘finished faster’
- (16) a. *ganz mehr jüing-er als i*  
 very more young\COM-COM than 1SG  
 ‘much younger than me’  
 b. *mehr klein-e dann i*  
 more small-COM than 1SG  
 ‘smaller than me’

#### 4.1.4 Pronouns

The system of personal pronouns in Unserdeutsch (see Figure 3) is a hybrid one, showing both formal or semantic transfer from the contact languages as well as some innovations unique to Unserdeutsch.

|                        | singular   | plural          |
|------------------------|--|-----------------|
| 1 <sup>st</sup> person | <i>i</i>   | <i>wi (uns)</i> |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> person | <i>du</i>  | <i>(eu/du)</i>  |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> person | <i>er (masculine)</i><br><i>sie (she) (feminine)</i> | <i>die</i>      |

Figure 3: Unserdeutsch personal pronouns

The first and second person singular personal pronouns are *i* (acrolectal *ich*) and *du* respectively. In absence of grammatical gender in basilectal Unserdeutsch, third person singular pronouns mark biological sex only. The masculine form *er* stands in opposition to the feminine form *sie* (sometimes pronounced like English *she*). In this respect, Unserdeutsch is unlike Standard German and English with their additional neuter forms (*es/it*), and also unlike

Tok Pisin, which only has one gender neutral form (*em*). As a result of the absence of a neuter pronoun, Unserdeutsch also does not use expletive noun phrases either. This trait in turn qualifies Unserdeutsch as a partial pro-drop language. Standard German expletives are reanalysed and lack an overt subject (see 17 and 32).

- (17) *Wann regen alle frosch komm oben.*  
 when rain PL frog come up  
 ‘When it was raining, the frogs came up.’

Since there is also no impersonal pronoun like Standard German *man* (English *one*), impersonal constructions are formed by using the second person singular pronoun *du* (see 18 and 40).

- (18) *Wenn du hat schuh du kann ni lauf-en schnell.*  
 if 2SG have shoe 2SG can not walk-v fast  
 ‘One (you) cannot run fast with shoes.’

The first person plural pronoun is *wi*, by some speakers more or less often replaced by the by-form *uns* (derived from the Standard German dative/accusative form) (see 19). The inclusive-exclusive distinction between these two forms described by Volker (1982: 31f) in the past, following the difference between *mipela* (exclusive) and *yumi* (inclusive) in Tok Pisin, cannot be confirmed from the present data. In fact, the occasional variation between the two forms, which can be observed among some speakers, seems to be free without any semantic distinction. In an acceptability test conducted with some speakers, all speakers either accepted *wi* alone or both forms without any semantic difference.

- (19) *But wenn uns ferti schule, wi geht zu university.*  
 but when 1PL finished school 1PL go to university  
 ‘But when we finished school, we went to university.’

The use of any second person plural personal pronoun is rare, but when present in basilectal speech, it is mostly *eu* (from Standard German accusative/dative form *euch*) or, less often, *du* (see 20 and 21).

- (20) *I bring-en eu beide geht haus karabusch.*  
 1SG bring-v 2PL both go house jail  
 ‘I will bring the two of you to jail.’ (TP *haus kalabus* ‘jail’)

- (21) *Du zwei komm zu schule hier auf mission!*  
 2PL two come to school here at mission  
 ‘The two of you come to school here at the mission!’

The third person plural pronoun is *die*, in its form identical to the demonstrative pronoun in Standard German. The Standard German third person plural personal pronoun *sie*, like its Standard German homophone, the second person formal *Sie*, is not found in basilectal speech.

Unlike their Standard German counterparts, basilectal Unserdeutsch personal pronouns are usually not marked for case. Two supraindividual exceptions are the first person plural pronoun *wi/uns*, *uns* being obligatory used in object-position (see 22), and the third person singular masculine pronoun *er*, with the form *ihm* (Standard German dative) sometimes found in object-position (see 23). Thus, there are some traces of a nominative versus non-nominative distinction in the pronominal system of Unserdeutsch.

- (22) *Alle American schweste die komm fi teach-im uns ...*  
 all American sister 3PL come for teach-TR 1PL.NNOM  
 ‘All American sisters came to teach us ...’
- (23) *Die hat niemals ihm ge-seh-n.*  
 3SG have never 3SG.M.NNOM PTCP-see-V  
 ‘They never saw him.’

The system of possessive pronouns (see Figure 4) is largely based on the corresponding Standard German pronoun system. However, because of the absence of gender and case inflection, all pronouns have a single invariable form. The first person plural form shows two interchangeable variants (*unse/unsre*).

|                        |                                     |            |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------|
|                        | singular                            | plural     |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> person | mein                                | unse/unsre |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> person | dein                                | eure       |
| 3 <sup>rd</sup> person | sein (masculine)<br>ihre (feminine) | ihre       |

Figure 4: Unserdeutsch possessive pronouns

Neither reflexive pronouns nor reciprocal pronouns are used in Unserdeutsch. Reflexive constructions are nearly non-existent, but if they appear, they are formed by a repetition of the personal pronoun plus *selbs* ‘self’ (see 24). Reciprocal constructions, also rarely attested, are always formed with the English form *each other* (see 25).

- (24) *I hat ge-lern-en i selbs gitarre spielen.*  
 1SG AUX.PST PTCP-learn-V 1SG self guitar play  
 ‘I taught myself how to play the guitar.’
- (25) *Wi wit spreh-en zu each other ...*  
 1PL AUX.HAB speak-V to each other  
 ‘We would (always) speak to each other ...’

There is only one core demonstrative pronoun in Unserdeutsch (*diese* ‘this’), although the third person plural personal pronoun *die* may also bear demonstrative meaning, indeed. Interrogative pronouns and indefinite pronouns are inherited from Standard German, though less in number. The indefinite pronoun *alle* ‘all’ (as in 22) is homonymous to the plural marker in Unserdeutsch. The default relative pronoun is *wo* as in (26). This usage can be explained by superstrate transfer from southwestern varieties of continental spoken German used by some of the early missionaries (see Maitz and Lindenfesler 2018), but it is also similar to the use of *we*, from English *where*, in Tok Pisin.

- (26) UNS *de ganze haus wo is auf de strasse*  
 ART.DEF whole house REL COP.3SG on the street

TP *olgeta haus, we i stap long rot*  
 all house REL PM stay on road  
 ‘all the houses which are on the street’

#### 4.1.5 Uninflected word classes

There is one definite article and one indefinite article in basilectal Unserdeutsch, both largely obligatory in use. The definite article is invariable *de* [dɛ]. The indefinite article is *ein*, identical to the Standard German masculine and neuter nominative indefinite article. Like *de*, it does change neither for gender nor for case.

The adposition inventory of basilectal Unserdeutsch is much smaller than that of its lexifier language. These are only prepositions, since postpositions and circumpositions from Standard German, which are in any case more characteristic of formal and written German, have not been retained. Most prepositions are of German origin and with a similar meaning as in Standard German. Some, however, are used with a meaning that has been transferred from English:

- (27) a. *in Englisch* ‘in English’ (SGER *auf Englisch*, literally ‘on English’)  
 b. *an boot* ‘on the boat’ (SGER *auf dem Schiff*)  
 c. *su Rabaul* ‘to Rabaul’ (SGER *nach Rabaul*)

Cases of preposition stranding similar to corresponding constructions in both northern German superstrate varieties and English can be observed in Unserdeutsch, as well (see 28 and Maitz and Lindenfelser 2018):

- (28) *Mei grossvater i weiss nich von.*  
 1SG.POSS grandfather 1SG know not about  
 ‘I do not know anything about my grandfather.’

Conjunctions in Unserdeutsch are mainly derived from Standard German, though the inventory is filled up with elements transferred from English, as well. Often, the use of a German derived conjunction and its functional equivalent taken from English alternate: *fiwas/wegen* ‘because’ alternates with *(be)cause*; *ode* ‘or’ with *o(r)*; *ob* ‘whether’ with *whether* etc.

A salient polyfunctional word in Unserdeutsch is *fi* ‘for/of/to’, likely a phonologically adapted form of Standard German *für* ‘for’, but also documented in various English-lexifier pidgins and creoles with astonishingly similar forms and functions as in Unserdeutsch (see, e.g., Winford 1985; Kortmann and Lunkenheimer 2013). Beyond the core semantics of its Standard German equivalent, the preposition acquired in Unserdeutsch additional functions similar to Tok Pisin *bilong*, for instance in forming possessive constructions (see 29).

- (29) *Diese halbweisse er heirat-en swesterhen fi diese Kinese.*  
 this mixed\_race 3SG.M marry-V sister of this Chinese  
 ‘This mixed-race (man) married the sister of that Chinese.’

*Fi* is also used to introduce final non-argument clauses, such as (30):<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, in the English of a number of Unserdeutsch speakers, *for* was also used both for possession and as a complementiser (*those ideas for Harry; You should go for buying all of them*). Among Unserdeutsch people living in Australia, this is common when telling jokes where the butt of the joke is supposed to be speaking ‘Mission English’. It should be noted that this use of *for* does not otherwise occur in Papua New Guinean English today. It is possible that this use of Unserdeutsch *fi* and Vunapope Mission English *for* reflects an earlier

- (30) *Das ni genuch fi fill-en auf mein bauch.*  
 that not enough for fill-V up 1SG.POSS stomach  
 ‘That was not enough to fill my stomach up.’

Moreover, *fi* appears as part of the construction *fi was*, used as a bipartite interrogative for ‘why’ (see 31) as well as a subordinating conjunction for ‘because’ (see 32).

- (31) *Fi was du wein-en?*  
 for what 2SG cry-V  
 ‘Why do you cry?’

- (32) *I hat ge-mach-en fiwas hat kein store.*  
 1SG AUX.PST PTCP-make-V because have no store  
 ‘I made these (sago biscuits), because there was no store.’

### 4.3 Syntax

#### 4.3.1 Constituent order

Unserdeutsch word order shows a strong substrate influence from Tok Pisin and differs therefore in a number of respects from Standard German, its lexifier language. The default constituent order is almost invariably SVO. This holds true across sentence types. If an adjunct is topicalised, most often a local or temporal adjunct (see 7 and 8), SVO is preserved in the main clause, whereas there is subject-verb inversion in Standard German. Apart from the sentence-initial position, such adjuncts may also occupy the sentence-final position in Unserdeutsch (see 33).

- (33) *Du muss heraus von Vunapope jetz.*  
 2SG must out of Vunapope now  
 ‘You must leave Vunapope now.’

Quite often, the subject of a main clause is made more salient by left dislocation (see 22 and 29), as it is also common in Tok Pisin. All kinds of subordinate clauses (see, e.g., 18 and 26) have SVO word order. This is in contrast to Standard German, where the verb is moved to the end. The same applies to imperative sentences (see 21) and to polar questions (see 34), both of which have verb-initial word order in Standard German and in English, but not in Tok Pisin.

- (34) *Du hat spreh-en zu [name] o nogat?*  
 2SG AUX.PST speak-V to [name] or not  
 ‘Have you spoken to [name], or not (yet)?’ (TP *o nogat* ‘or not’)

Unlike Standard German and English, but as in Tok Pisin, wh-fronting is optional in basilectal Unserdeutsch. Thus, the wh-interrogative is sometimes in sentence-final position (see 35), reinforcing SVO in probe questions, too.

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form of Tok Pisin, where *fo(r)* was also used there as a complementiser, as it still is in the closely related Solomons Pijin and Vanuatu Bislama.

- (35) *Du wit sa was?*  
 2SG AUX.IRR say what  
 ‘What would you say?’

However, Germanic word order with wh-fronting (see 31) is much more common. One reason for its preference seems to be that fact that the word order with sentence-final wh-interrogative is regarded as “bad German” by the speakers and therefore avoided. As one speaker put it: ‘we think *du geht wo?* [‘Where do you go?'] is broken German, as *wo gehts* [sic!] *du?* is the correct German.’

Looking beyond SVO, one can observe that Unserdeutsch is more strongly head-initial with reference to the head-directionality parameter than Standard German, which is rather mixed in that respect (see Roelcke 2011: 63–65). Head-final structures in Unserdeutsch are restricted to the noun phrase (adjective – noun; numeral – noun; demonstrative – noun).

Verbal elements tend to adjacency within complex verb phrases in basilectal Unserdeutsch, resulting in a reduction of the Standard German ‘bracket constructions’, which are unknown to English and Tok Pisin. There are different types of bracket constructions in Standard German (see Weinrich 2007: 41–60), however, only the lexical bracket (encompassing elements between a verb particle and the verb root) and the grammatical bracket (encompassing elements between the copula, an auxiliary, or a modal verb and the main verb) are relevant with respect to Unserdeutsch. As in English, the elements of a potential lexical bracket are usually not separated by another constituent in Unserdeutsch (see 30, 33 and 36).

- (36) *I ma weg mein hose ...*  
 1SG do away 1SG.POSS trousers  
 ‘I took off my trousers ...’

With respect to grammatical brackets, more variation can be observed, however with a clear trend: either there is no grammatical bracket at all (see 4, 5, 6, 24, 25 and 34) or there is only one other constituent between the verbal elements. There seem to be no constraints with regard to the constituent types that may be in this position. Negators are usually placed within the grammatical bracket (as in 8 and 10). But adjuncts (as in 5b) and objects (as in 37) may also be placed between the verbal elements. The rare instances with two constituents in this position can be considered as highly marked. Such constructions are only possible, if both constituents are short, ideally single-word constituents (as in 23).

- (37) *er hat ein andre frau ge-find-en.*  
 3SG.M AUX.PST ART.INDF other woman PTCP-find-V  
 ‘He (has) found another woman.’

In simple verb phrases, the negator *ni* ‘not’ (from SGER *nicht*) is usually placed at the beginning of the verb phrase (see 38), similar to the syntax of negation in Tok Pisin as well as in many other creole languages. The only exceptions are high-frequent chunks, such as *i weiss ni* ‘I don’t know’, where the negator is in post-verbal position, copying the negation syntax of the lexifier language.

- (38) *I ni ess-en rot-e fleisch.*  
 1SG not eat-V red-ATTR meat  
 ‘I don’t eat red meat.’

### 4.3.2 Predication

Unlike Tok Pisin, Unserdeutsch has a copula (see 12, 26 and 39) that, as explained above, is usually inflected for person and number. However, its use is optional (see 11 and 40) in contrast to Standard German, where the copula is obligatory.

(39) *I bin riti zorn mit [name].*  
1SG COP.1SG really angry with [name]  
'I am really angry with [name].'

(40) *Wenn du hambak un alle schwester seh-en du ...*  
if 2SG fool\_around and PL sister see-V 2SG  
'When you fool around and the sisters see you ...' (TP *hambak* 'fool around')

One salient syntactic feature of basilectal Unserdeutsch is the possibility to form directional serial verbs with *komm* 'come' and *geht* 'go' (see 41), which are then reanalysed as directional markers *geht* 'to' and *komm* 'from'. This corresponds to the use of the serial verb constructions *V + i go* and *V + i kam* in Tok Pisin.

(41) a. *Un dann de bishop lauf-en komm ...*  
and then ART.DEF bishop walk-V come  
'And then the bishop came there.'

b. *I lauf-en geht haus pekpek.*  
1SG walk-V go house shit  
'I go to the toilet.' (Tok Pisin *haus pekpek* 'toilet', vulg.)

In summary, it can be stated that the phonological and grammatical profile of basilectal Unserdeutsch, despite the atypical circumstances of languages genesis, largely corresponds to the typological mainstream of creole languages as reflected in Michaelis et al. (2013) (see Lindenfelser and Maitz 2017).

## 5 Lexicon

### 5.1 General characteristics

The lexicon of Unserdeutsch is overwhelmingly based on that of Standard German. The nearly total German relexification of the language can be explained by the fact that the first generation at Vunapope Mission had unencumbered access to the lexifier language and was, indeed, immersed in it as a result of its conscious socialisation by the German missionaries. Because intensive immersion in Standard German increasingly diminished after the end of German colonialism in New Guinea in 1914 and virtually disappeared after the end of World War II, the Unserdeutsch lexicon has retained a number of lexemes that would be regarded as archaic or unusual in modern Standard German, such as *knabe* (< SGER *Knabe*) 'boy' or *hergemal/hergeman* (< SGER *Herr Gemahl*) 'husband'.

The range of the lexicon of Unserdeutsch is much reduced in comparison to that of its lexifier language. While this is common in all creole languages, it is particularly so with Unserdeutsch because Unserdeutsch has always been solely an in-group language used in informal everyday contexts. For many more formal registers, including religion, technology, and bureaucracy, the multilingual Unserdeutsch speakers have always had access to a native-

like command of German and/or English so that there has never been a need to develop an Unserdeutsch lexicon for these registers. This was particularly the case because much of the communication related to these registers was with speakers of those languages.

Today, virtually all speakers of Unserdeutsch are at least trilingual. Besides Unserdeutsch, they are also competent speakers of Tok Pisin and even more so of Australian English, using both in their everyday life. For the current (and undoubtedly last) generation of Unserdeutsch speakers, English is the dominant language in their linguistic repertoire. Since almost all speakers emigrated to Australia from Papua New Guinea, Tok Pisin for most plays only a marginal communicative role as an oral in-group language today. English, on the other hand, has been the most commonly used written and spoken language for decades even inside the community. Since both of these languages have played such important roles for Unserdeutsch speakers, it is not surprising that lexical items have been and continue to be borrowed from English and Tok Pisin.

## 5.2 Lexical transfer from Tok Pisin

Lexical transfer from the dominant substrate language Tok Pisin may be rather moderate in terms of quantity, but is nevertheless quite salient since words of Tok Pisin origin tend to be words in frequent use, with a strong lexical as well as grammatical and pragmatic influence on the language. The fact that the influence of Tok Pisin on Unserdeutsch in the areas of phonology and grammar is noticeably greater than in the lexicon is to be expected given the type of language contact at the time Unserdeutsch came into being. The quite extensive structural borrowings can be explained by the function of Tok Pisin as the dominant substrate language, while the much more modest lexical influence was a result of a nearly complete German relexification.

We can divide the Tok Pisin lexical influence on Unserdeutsch into several types. The first is with words having the same form and meaning as the original Tok Pisin (see Volker 2008). Most of these loans are content words having to do with the local culture either in Papua New Guinea as a whole or specifically at the Vunapope Mission: *hausboi/hausmeri* ‘male/female domestic servant’, *kakaruk* ‘chicken’, *kaukau* ‘sweet potato’ *hapkas* ‘half-caste/mixed-race’, *wantok* ‘countryman/friend/mate’, *kanda* ‘cane’, *wokabaut* ‘to walk, to take a walk’, etc. There is often a hybrid inflection of these loan words by basilectal and mesolectal speakers in which words of Tok Pisin origin receive both Unserdeutsch and Tok Pisin affixation, as with *gerentim* ‘rented’ in (42), containing the Unserdeutsch participle prefix *ge-* together with the transitive suffix *-im* from Tok Pisin:

- (42) *I hat ein haus ge-rent-im in Woodridge.*  
 1SG AUX.PST ART.INDF house PTCP-rent-TR in Woodridge  
 ‘I rented a house in Woodridge.’

Loanwords in Unserdeutsch are not limited to content words, as there is a smaller number of loans with a grammatical or pragmatic function, such as conjunctions such as *maski* ‘although/never mind/nevertheless’ in (43) or discourse markers such as *orait* ‘all right/so’ in (3) (see also Volker 1982: 30).

- (43) *Alle schwester war gut zu mir, maski, i hab*  
 PL sister COP.PST good to 1SG.NNOM nevertheless 1SG AUX.PST  
  
*imme de stock ge-krich.*  
 always ART.DEF stick PTCP-get

‘Although the sisters were good to me, I always got the stick.’ (TP *maski* ‘nevertheless’)

A second group of both content and function words are calques in which words of German origin are used to form lexical items on Tok Pisin patterns, e.g., *salzwasser* < TP *solwara* ‘ocean’, *fi was* < TP *bilong wanem* ‘why’, and *kleine haus* ‘toilet’ < TP *liklik haus* ‘small house, toilet’.

A third group is words with loaned meanings, in which the semantic range of a word of German origin has been widened to include that of a (near) homophone in Tok Pisin, as with *platz* which has added the meaning ‘village’ (from Tok Pisin *ples*, derived from English *place*) to its Standard German meaning ‘place’, or *alle* (Standard German ‘all’) as a plural marker on the basis of Tok Pisin *ol* (from English *all*), e.g., Unserdeutsch *alle knabe* / TP *ol manki* ‘boys’.

### 5.3 Lexical transfer from (Australian) English

The lexical influence of English is noticeably greater than that of Tok Pisin, especially with content words. This is unsurprising since English has become the most dominant language of the current generation of Unserdeutsch speakers. Words of English origin are particularly noticeable with semantic fields related to local and cultural life from the Australian colonial era in Papua New Guinea as well as to everyday life in Australia after the emigration of the community, e.g., *business, government, office, holiday, mixed-race, indigenous, own, generation, mechanic, store*, etc. In addition, cardinal numbers (especially higher numbers, such as years) are generally expressed in English. Lexical insertions from English often end up being the trigger for code switching into English. Similarly, when speakers are at a loss for a word or term, they generally fall back on English. This language mixing in all its forms leads to a strong Australian English influence in how Unserdeutsch speakers use the language and overall to a more or less common multilingual speech mode among Unserdeutsch speakers.

As with Tok Pisin, besides content words, a smaller number of English function words have been taken into the language. Besides discourse markers, these include conjunctions such as *or, whether ... or*, and *cause/because*. In many cases, the grammatical element fills lexical gaps in the same way the incorporation of English content words does. This is particularly the case with conjunctions, as the inventory of conjunctions in Unserdeutsch is much more reduced than in its lexifier language (Standard German) so that propositions (sentences) can be juxtaposed after one another with no overt connecting element (see Grein 1998: 79). An example of an English conjunction, in this case *whether... or*, filling a lexical gap rather than substituting for an existing conjunction of German origin can be seen in (44).

(44) *whether du will or du will ni*  
whether 2SG want or 2SG want not  
‘whether you want or not’

Just as with words of Tok Pisin origin, words of English origin can also often be inflected to form hybrid complex words with an English root and German (see *gemention* in 45) or Tok Pisin (see *leasim* in 46) affixes.

(45) *Du hat ge-mention ihre mutter.*  
2SG AUX.PST PTCP-mention 3SG.F.POSS mother  
‘You mentioned her mother.’

- (46) *Du kann leas-im de flanzung fi finf jahr-e.*  
 2SG can lease-TR ART.DEF plantation for five year-PL  
 ‘You can lease the plantation for five years.’

The relatively wide range of content and function words taken from English is a result of the strong pressure to use English in a dominant monolingual English environment in Australia (see Thomason and Kaufman 1988: 74ff). But since the macro-sociolinguistic context before emigration of the community from Papua New Guinea to Australia was completely different, we can assume that the Unserdeutsch lexicon used certainly by the first, and probably also by the second, generation of speakers was much less influenced by English.

## 6 Conclusions

New languages can emerge in two ways: evolutionary (gradual) and catastrophic (saltational) (see Bickerton 1988). Unserdeutsch has (also) in terms of the circumstances of language genesis a special position among the varieties of German. Virtually all varieties of German outside of the German-speaking countries emerged as a result of gradual divergence from their source language as a result of more or less intense contact with other languages in their new environment. There are very few extraterritorial high-contact varieties of German that have emerged through abrupt, catastrophic restructuring. Some few colonial varieties may belong to this latter group, which in addition to Unserdeutsch would include the Ali Pidgin German of Papua New Guinea, which has hardly been documented and has surely died out (see Mühlhäusler 1977, 2001), and Kiche Duits (Namibian Black German) of Namibia (see Deumert 2003, 2009, in this volume). But while Ali Pidgin and Kiche Duits have been unstable and uncreolised (pre-)pidgins, Unserdeutsch is the only known example in the world of an actual creole language based on German. But even among creoles, Unserdeutsch is atypical in many respects in that it most certainly did not, as explained above, develop from a pidgin, but rather from a pidginised cant created and used by children and teenagers (see Maitz 2017). Unserdeutsch is also atypical in that like Tayo in New Caledonia (see Ehrhart 1993) or Roper River Kriol in the Northern Territory of Australia (see Schultze-Berndt et al. 2013), it is one of a small number of creoles with their genesis in boarding schools. Lastly, it is atypical in that its main substrate language, an early form of Tok Pisin, is a pidgin language itself. For all of these reasons, Unserdeutsch should be of great interest for Germanic linguistics, language typology and especially creole studies and evolutionary linguistics. It is therefore puzzling that until now the language has been almost totally ignored by linguistic researchers.

The linguistic documentation of the language is all the more urgent because of its endangered status (see Maitz and Volker 2017). Language transmission was completely broken in the 1960s. Even the youngest fluent speakers today are older than 55. After the emigration of almost all of the community to the urban suburbs of eastern Australia, the communicative value of the language for all intents and purposes has disappeared. From an everyday language for in-group and family communication, in a monolingual English setting Unserdeutsch has become primarily an emblematic language used to express group identity in a multicultural setting. Today Unserdeutsch is only occasionally used in the speech community, usually in formal ritualistic settings, such as weddings, funerals or community gatherings. In these settings, it functions primarily as a marker of group identity rather than as a language for communicative purposes. According to the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale in Ethnologue (Lewis et al. 2018), Unserdeutsch is therefore nearly extinct (level 8b), and according to the UNESCO Language Vitality and Endangerment framework it is critically endangered (level 5). In the absence of any successful language revitalisation in

the next few years, Unserdeutsch will disappear as a living language in the next two to three decades.

### Abbreviations

|      |                        |      |                     |
|------|------------------------|------|---------------------|
| 1PL  | first person plural    | IRR  | irrealis            |
| 1SG  | first person singular  | M    | masculine           |
| 2PL  | second person plural   | NNOM | non-nominative      |
| 2SG  | second person singular | PL   | plural              |
| 3PL  | third person plural    | PM   | predicate marker    |
| 3SG  | third person singular  | POSS | possessive          |
| ACC  | accusative             | PROG | progressive         |
| ART  | article                | PST  | past                |
| ATTR | attributive            | PTCP | participle          |
| AUX  | auxiliary              | REL  | relative            |
| COM  | comparative            | SG   | singular            |
| COP  | copula                 | SGER | Standard German     |
| DEF  | definite               | SVO  | subject-verb-object |
| F    | feminine               | TP   | Tok Pisin           |
| FUT  | future                 | TR   | transitive          |
| HAB  | habitual               | UNS  | Unserdeutsch        |
| INDF | indefinite             | V    | verb marker         |

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