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**Language Contact in the German Colonies:  
Papua New Guinea and beyond**

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## LANGUAGE CONTACT IN THE GERMAN COLONIES: INTRODUCTION

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German colonial rule was short-lived, but spanned a wide diversity of linguistic situations in China, Oceania, and Africa, some intensely multilingual (cf. Mühlhäusler 1984). This special issue of *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia* deals with the legacy of the German language in these former German colonies. It is the outcome of ‘Colonial Varieties of German’, an international workshop organised by Péter Maitz at the University of Augsburg in June 2016. The workshop took place as part of an international research project on documenting Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German), worldwide the only German-based creole language, which emerged around 1900 among mixed-race children at a Catholic mission in Vunapope near Rabaul, Papua New Guinea.<sup>1</sup>

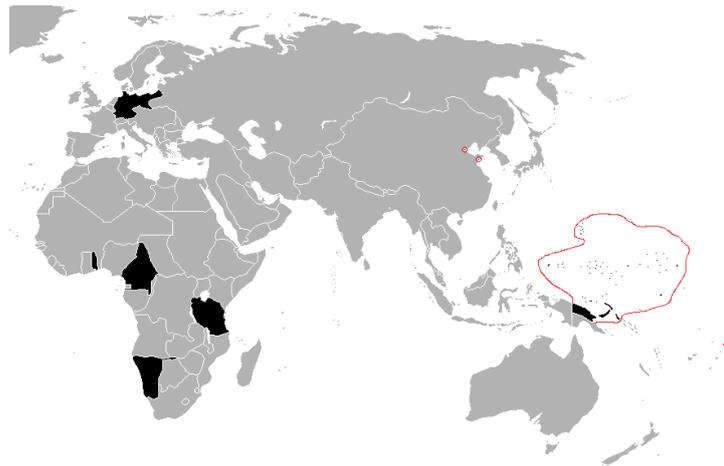
The purpose of the workshop was to assemble in one place researchers who have been working on the linguistic documentation and description of colonial varieties and language contact in the former German colonies. Another aim of the workshop was to bring together scholars working on the fairly new field of German colonial linguistics with experts of other colonial languages and settings from whom they can learn much – and vice versa. The contributors represented research institutions in three continents (Australia/Oceania, Africa, and Europe) and a wide spectrum of disciplines, ranging for example from creolistics through linguistic typology and lexicography to linguistic anthropology. Almost every individual or research group invited could come or, in the case of Peter Mühlhäusler,

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive list of publications related to this project see [https://www.philhist.uni-augsburg.de/en/lehrstuehle/germanistik/sprachwissenschaft/rabaul\\_creole\\_german/](https://www.philhist.uni-augsburg.de/en/lehrstuehle/germanistik/sprachwissenschaft/rabaul_creole_german/).

contribute in writing. Thus, even though the number of contributors is relatively small, this collection of papers reflects current research activities and most major foci within the hitherto neglected and highly under-researched field of language contact in the former German colonies.

Colonial amnesia is unfortunately all too common a phenomenon in Germany. The fact that research into linguistic aspects of German colonialism and especially into colonial varieties of German is still fairly underrepresented in both Germanic linguistics as well as in pidgin and creole studies, has at least two main reasons. First, crucial colonial activities of the German Empire began late and spanned little more than three decades between 1884 and World War I. Compared with the Portuguese, British or Dutch colonial empires, the size of German colonies was relatively small (see Map 1), and the number of German-based pidgin and especially creole languages correspondingly modest. A brief overview of these overseas varieties of German can be found in Mühlhäusler (1984). As far as is known, nowadays only two of them are still in use, both of them critically endangered: Namibian Black German (Kiche Duits), a German-based pidgin(oid) spoken in Namibia (cf. Deumert 2009 and this issue) and Unserdeutsch (Rabaul Creole German), a German-lexified creole that emerged in German New Guinea, nowadays spoken by about 100 elderly speakers living mostly in the metropolitan areas of eastern Australia (cf. Maitz & Volker 2017 and Lindenfelser & Maitz, this issue).



*Map 1. The German colonial empire in 1914 (map by 'Andrew0921')*

The second reason for the long-lasting lack of scientific interest in colonial varieties and colonial language contact among German linguists has to do with two dominant language ideologies behind the European tradition of historical linguistics: the standard language ideology (cf. Gal 2006) and the monolingual bias in language historiography (cf. Deumert 2010 and Mattheier 2010). German has traditionally been described both within and as part of a monolingual history of gradual language development with a special focus on the rise of the standard language:

The concept of a ‘national language history’ has dominated the view of what historical linguistics should be concerned with in relation to virtually all European languages, and continues to do so today. The theoretical starting point of this view [...] is the thesis that the ‘standard’ language is the genuine teleological goal of any historical language development. And the path trodden by a speech community in developing a standard language, a unifying language, a literary language, at the same time represents the central content of language history. (Mattheier 2010: 353–354)

The end result in Europe of these two language ideologies (together with ‘west is best’ as a guiding colonial principle) was and remains the invisibilisation or at least marginalisation of nonstandard and multilingual practices for linguistic research, including the processes and outcomes of language contact and multilingualism in the former German colonies. In fact, most textbooks and handbooks of the history of German do not even mention the colonial varieties of German; even on the over 750 pages of the most comprehensive handbook to date dedicated to the history of German in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there is not more than one single sentence about a Pidgin-Deutsch reported to have been spoken among the indigenous people in the German colonies (Polenz 1999: 464).

Of course, other factors and circumstances may also have played a role (cf. Maitz & Volker 2017), but this historical and ideological background might explain, at least partly, why until recently linguists based in Germany have not shown any genuine scientific interest in the linguistic documentation and description of the colonial varieties of German. Indeed, the first comprehensive scholarly contributions addressing German-based colonial high-contact varieties in Papua New Guinea were made in the 1970s and 1980s by two scholars living and working outside of Europe and the German-speaking world (cf. Mühlhäusler 1977, 1984 and Volker 1982) and thus less influenced by the European research tradition mentioned

above, particularly as both of them, Peter Mühlhäusler and Craig Alan Volker, are linguists whose university studies were outside German-speaking Europe and not in the traditional German linguistic tradition. Both are now affiliated with Australian universities with long histories of research into pidgin and creole languages, language contact and multilingualism in the South Pacific. In the same way, the first comprehensive fieldwork in former German South West Africa, resulting in the first scientific papers on Namibian Black German (Deumert 2003, 2009), was carried out by Ana Deumert from the University of Cape Town.

In summary, we can state that until recently, all what we knew about colonial varieties of German was due to the individual efforts of a small handful of German-speaking scholars working outside of German-speaking Europe. Moreover, up to now their work has not been widely known and appreciated among researchers in Germany (cf. Maitz & Volker 2017). To give an example, even in the latest edition of the most commonly used German textbook on language contact (Riehl 2014: 137–140), apart from the somewhat more detailed discussion of the linguistic status of Namibian Black German, we find only some short doubting thoughts about the potential existence of German-based pidgins in the South Seas, even though for instance Volker's fieldwork-based linguistic sketch of *Unserdeutsch* (Volker 1982) had been used and quoted decades earlier by leading experts of pidgin and creole languages, such as Peter Mühlhäusler (1986) and Suzanne Romaine (1988).

However, this situation has been changing over the last few years, at least in Germany. The reasons for this positive turn are not yet clear and may, indeed, be unrelated and simply serendipitous, but it is a fact that within the last five to ten years or so several new research projects have been initiated and papers and conferences have appeared in Germany addressing different linguistic aspects of German colonialism. In addition to interdisciplinary collaborations, such as the conference on the cultural legacy of German colonial rule in 2016 at the German Historical Museum in Berlin (Mühlhahn 2017), these have included:

1. the lexicographical project 'Dictionary of words of German origin in Tok Pisin' based at the *Institut für Deutsche Sprache* (Institute for the

- German Language) in Mannheim (see Engelberg & Stolberg, this issue);
2. the establishment of a Creative Unit on Language in Colonial Contexts at the University of Bremen (see e.g., Dewein et al. 2012, Stolz & Warnke in press), focusing on various linguistic aspects of European colonialism in general, including the former German colonies;
  3. the Namdeutsch Research Project documenting and describing the dynamics of German within the German-Namibian community (see Wiese et al., this issue);
  4. the University of Augsburg Unserdeutsch Research Project, the first ever fieldwork-based language documentation project based in Germany with a colonial variety of German in its focus (see Maitz & Volker 2017, Götze et al., this issue, as well as the project website mentioned above).

These four linguistic projects were all represented at the Augsburg workshop and, except for Thomas Stolz from Bremen, who was unfortunately unable to submit his paper, all have contributed to this special issue, which is the first collection of articles specifically related to language contact in the former German colonies.

While this collection is by no means an exhaustive study of the field, the diversity represented in these eight articles is indicative of the types of further research into languages and language contact in the former German colonial empire that remains to be pursued. Geographically, the collection begins with an overview of German language policies and practices in the Pacific and China (Mühlhäusler). It also includes articles about Papua New Guinea (Lindenfelser & Maitz, Götze et al., and Engelberg & Stolberg), historical developments in various South Pacific creoles and pidgins (Neuhof and Ehrhart), and varieties of German in the former German colony in Namibia (Deumert and Wiese et al.).

Thematically the collection touches on a number of interesting areas. It begins with two historical articles. The first is a historical overview of Germany's often quite different colonial language policies in its Asia-Pacific colonies by Peter Mühlhäusler. This is followed by Stefan Engelberg & Doris Stolberg's discussion of the history of Tok Pisin lexicography and related questions about the extent of direct German influence on the lexicon of Tok Pisin and further indirect influence (through

Tok Pisin) on Papua New Guinean vernacular languages. Two articles deal with Unserdeutsch, the creole German of Vunapope in Papua New Guinea, the documentation of which was the impetus for the conference that resulted in the discussions collected in this issue. One (Lindenfelser & Maitz) is a fieldwork-based analysis of the main typological features of the language, addressing the question of the structural ‘creole typicality’ of Unserdeutsch against the backdrop of the highly atypical circumstances of its emergence. The other article (Götze et al.) provides an up-to-date report on the goals and different stages of the Unserdeutsch documentation project, addressing questions of both fieldwork methodology and corpus development. Damaris Neuhof’s article introduces a database based at the University of Giessen that allows extended searches into historical texts in pidgin and creole languages and, by showing how this can answer certain questions about English-lexifier pidgins, indicates how this could also be a useful tool in looking at historical German contact varieties as well. Sabine Ehrhart’s historical study of Palmerston English, an English-lexifier creole in the Cook Islands, and Tayo, a French-lexifier creole in New Caledonia, examines the genesis and subsequent development of these languages in the light of language-internal and contact-induced change and the role of second-language role models in creole genesis. The motivation for language change is an issue also discussed in a quite different context in the first of two articles about German in Namibia (Wiese et al.), which in addition examines the sociolinguistic situation of German in post-independence Namibia, comparing language change in German in that multilingual country with the use of German in certain multilingual environments in Germany. A quite different role for German in Namibia is discussed by Ana Deumert, who shows that its appropriation as a second language was in many ways an act of resistance by black Namibians to colonialism. As she indicates, this is relevant to examinations of the use of other apparently conscious decisions to use German or other colonial languages, even when another language was already in active use as an interethnic lingua franca.

We would like to express our thanks to the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) for making the workshop financially possible and to all participants for their inspiring contributions to both the workshop and this special issue. Thanks are also due to the support staff (Felix Auer, Elisabeth Bunz, Rebecca Karrer and Lena

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