

German colonial sources and the history of Pidgin English. A first analysis of the material relating to German New Guinea in the Deutsche Kolonialbibliothek

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Diachronic research into the structure and sociohistory of earlier stages of European-lexifier pidgins and creoles has considerably advanced our knowledge of the origins, development and interrelationships of these languages in the past two decades. However, in many cases we are still far from knowing the exact circumstances of the emergence and early history of these varieties.

For various reasons (e.g. insufficient competence in German, Gothic font) and with some notable exceptions (e.g. the work of Peter Mühlhäusler), German sources have so far been neglected in the study of early Pidgin Englishes, although German mercantile, missionary and colonial activity in the 19th and early 20th centuries falls into a crucial period in the development of Pidgin English in Africa and the Pacific. The valuable insights provided by e.g. Buchner (1885) for West Africa suggest that a systematic scan of material relating to German overseas activities can unearth a lot of information on the use and users of restructured English (and other languages) as well as actual Pidgin quotations.

Our research, which is part of a larger project, the Database of Early Pidgin and Creole Texts (DEPiCT), will be a first step towards a survey and examination of German sources for the study of early Pidgin Englishes. We will analyze the material relating to German New Guinea housed in the *Deutsche Kolonialbibliothek*, the library of the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* (German Colonial Society), founded in 1887. The library contains about 18,000 items plus a large number of colonial periodicals and is today housed in the Frankfurt/Main university library.

The travel accounts and memoirs of Germans that visited or worked in German New Guinea allow the reconstruction of the language contact situation on the microlevel, i.e. in different parts of the colonial territory or even on individual plantations. This is the level where pidginization took place and which therefore particular attention should be directed to. However, creolistics has so far tended to neglect this aspect, not least because a systematic, detailed and extensive analysis of historical sources only started recently. In our paper, we will look at what German historical sources can tell us about the sociolinguistic situation in which the emergence of the New Guinean English-lexicon contact language Tok Pisin took place. We will also consider actual language data as evidence relating to the structural evolution of the language.

The findings can be compared with theories on the genesis and early stages of Pacific Pidgin

English (as in e.g. Avram 2004; Baker 1987; Baker & Huber 2001; the contributions in Wurm, Mühlhäusler & Tryon 1996). For example, one theory (Mühlhäusler 1978) locates the predecessor of Tok Pisin on the German plantations in Samoa and it will be enlightening to see what evidence for or against this can be found in the *Kolonialbibliothek* sources.

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