Documenting and Describing Rabaul Creole German

Problems and Perspectives

Péter Maitz
University of Augsburg

Craig A. Volker
Divine Word University Madang

Outline

(1) Linguistic classification

(2) Current research situation

(3) Geographic distribution

(4) Language development

(5) Main linguistic characteristics

(6) Problems and prospects

Unique characteristics

- the **only documented German based creole** worldwide

- one of the few creoles which **did not develop from a (prototypical) pidgin**, but from a pidginized variety of Standard German used by mixed-race children at a missionary station

  - **developed among children** instead of adults (secret language?)

  - **means of in-group communication** instead of out-group communication from the very beginning

Current research situation

- Until the present day **widely unexplored** and rarely considered in German linguistics, although it was mentioned in the creolistics literature research since the 1980s (cf. Mühlhäusler 1986, Holm 2000)

- **Relevant literature**:

    - **language development and history**: Mühlhäusler (1984, 1996, 2001), Volker (1991), Voeste (2005)

    - **language structure**: Volker (1982, 1989, 1991)

    - **from a cross-linguistic point of view**: Klein (2004), Frowein (2005, 2006)

Geographic distribution

(1) **Bismarck-Archipelago**, Papua-New Guinea: about 5-10 speakers

- New Britain (Neu-Pommern)

- Duke-of-York-Island

- New Ireland (Neu-Mecklenburg)

(2) Australia, mainly in and around **Sydney** and SE **Queensland**: about 20- 30 speakers

- Exact number of speakers unknown (language shame!)

- All known proficient speakers are 65+

- All known speakers are multilingual (English, Tok Pisin, German)

1884-1918: Kaiser-Wilhelmsland and the Bismarck-Archipelago under German administration

- Catholic mission (SVD, MSC) in service of language distribution and proselytism: **missionary schools with German as the teaching language**

- 1897: In **Vunapope near Kokopo** (Herbertshöhe) an **orphanage for mixed-race children** is being established, who have neither been accepted by their indigenous mothers nor by their European fathers

Language development

- Children's **first language** (if existing): indigenous languages (Tolai), immigrant languages (Chinese, Malay etc.), Tok Pisin

- **Out-group language** (teaching language and language used with missionaries and teachers): "Normaldeutsch/Hochdeutsch" (Standard German)

- **In-group language** in dorms and common rooms: "Unserdeutsch" (German based pidgin)

Language development

- The small mixed race community is and remains in **social and geographic isolation**

- The **isolation** and the resulting **endogamy lead to creolization**: the children of the next two generations grow up with **Unserdeutsch as their first language**

- **Since 1960** more **exogamy,** the members of the community scattered in Papua New Guinea

- After the Papua New Guinean independence (1975) the **majority of the speakers moves to Queensland/Australia**

- Today: L1 of the younger generations is English (AUS) or Tok Pisin (PNG), **Unserdeutsch is no longer acquired as L1**

Main linguistic characteristics

Einmal war ein armer Müller. Aber er hat ein schöne Tochter. Ein König war da und er dachte „Ich (geh ???) und sehen ihn." König (mit dem ... mit) wollte ihm sagen: "Ich möchte ... Ich will gerne bei dir arbeiten und dafür ich habe ein schöne Tochter, die gut Gold spinnen kann. Und der König dann sagen zu der Müller: „Ihre Arbeit is gut. Und sie is ganz gut. Bringen und kommen zu mich morgen." „I will versuchen ihre Arbeit." Nächste Tag der Mädchen war gebracht zu ihm und er hat ganz ein große Haufen Stroh und der Spinnrad. Der König dann sagen zu sie: „Mach jetzt dein Arbeit!" Und ganz früh morgen der Stroh mit (...) Wenn du nich mach diese Stroh muss geht Gold du bist tot. Also er dann machen de Türe zu und versteckt ihn hinter de Zimmer gans alleine. Der arme Mädchen, Muellers Tochter, war sitzen ganz alleine in de Zimmer und wusste nich(t?), was sie jetzt sie muss machen. Sie wusste nich(t) wie sie muss anfangen fi spinnen Stroh das wird nachher Gold. Und er war gans traurig und er anfangen zu weinen. Auf einmal de Tür war auf und drin jemand kommt (he)rein und sagt: „Guten Abend Müllers Tochter! Warum du bist am weinen?" „Oh ..." sie antwortete: „I muss spinnen Gold aus Stroh, aber I weiß nicht wie muss machen." Denn der kleine Mensch sagen nachher: „Was du mitgeben mich wenn i(ch) machen das für dich?" „Mein Halskette?" de kleine Mädchen dann sagen zu ihm. De kleine Mensch holen der Halskette, sitzen neben de Spinnrad und fing an zu drehen. Drei mal ging es rund und der Rad war voll. (Er) holen noch einmal und wieder „Rrrrrr rrrrrr". Dreimal, und wieder war voll. So er machen machen machen bis Morgen, bis alle Stroh war gespinnt. Und alles war voll von Gold.

Main linguistic characteristics

- **Creolized, extended single-source pidgin** (typical for colonial situations with asymmetric distribution of power between the involved speech communities):

  - one single dominant **lexifier** language (superstrate language): Standard German, but transfer from Tok Pisin (Pidgin English) and English

  - **substrate** language: Tok Pisin, however grammatical structures are aligned with Standard German

  - **adstrate** language: English

- **Extensive structural variability along the creole continuum:** basilectal, mesolectal und acrolectal variants

- In comparison to the target language (Standard German) extensive **grammatical simplifications**

  - regularization of irregularities

  - elimination of grammatical categories and morphological markers

  - decrease of redundancy

Main linguistic characteristics

Structural characteristics can be explained by:

(a) Spontaneous simplification effects (L2 effects) of German

(b) Transfer from contact languages (Tok Pisin, English)

(a) Simplification effects (L2-effects)

(1) Regularization of irregularities (stem vowel alternation)

alle Stroh war **gespinnt / er** an**fang**en zu weinen / was du mit**geb**en mich

(2) Decrease of syntagmatic redundancy (repetition of information)

▪ Elimination of subject-verb agreement
de kleine **Mädchen** dann **sagen** zu ihm

(3) Elimination of morphologically marked grammatical categories (paradigmatic redundancy)

- Elimination of indication of person and number in verbal inflection

  der kleine **Mensch machen / er holen**

- Elimination of the grammatical category tense

  der kleine Mensch **sagen** nachher / i und du **geht** Kokopo

- Elimination of the grammatical category gender

  hinter **de Zimmer / de Tür** war auf / **de** nächste **Morgen**

- Elimination of inflectional plural marking →

  analytical plural marking (basilectal): **alle**

Main linguistic characteristics

However: untypical grammatical categories for creoles:

- Passive

  der Mädchen **war gebracht** zu ihm

- Progressive

  Warum **bist** du **am weinen**?

(4) Elimination of syntactic categories (redundancies):

- Verb frame

  I muss spinnen Gold aus Stroh

- Verb at final position in subordinate clauses

  Sie wusste nich(t) **wie sie muss anfangen**

  I weiß nicht **wie muss machen**

(b) Transfer, substrate influence

- Adjective: Elimination of the morphologically marked comparative
  Maria is **mehr klein** denn Des. (← Englisch)

- Wh-movement: interrogative pronoun/adverb in final position
  Du laufen geht **wo**? (← Tok Pisin)

- Passive construction (preposition)
  das Mädchen war gebracht zu ihm / De chicken **war gestohlen bei** alle Raskol.

- Analytical plural marking by *alle*
  Alle boi komm zu er. (← Tok Pisin *ol*)

- Exclusive and inclusive personal pronoun
  uns (inclusive) vs. **wir** (exclusive) (← Tok Pisin *yumi* vs. *mipela*)

Problems and prospects

(a) Language documentation:

- finding speakers (language shame!)
- collecting data (objectdata, metadata)
- building a speech corpus with transcripts for linguistic description and analysis

(b) Reconstruction and description of language history

- identifying the target language (language comparison, ego-documents, archival material)
- language biographies
- description of sociolinguistic history

(c) Description of the linguistic structure (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis)

(d) Description of the creole continuum and identifying relevant indipendent variables