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## **A pluricentric perspective of German minority varieties in Africa, Americas, Australia, and Oceania**

Albrecht Plewnia, Claudia M. Riehl (eds.). 2018. *Handbuch der deutschen Sprachminderheiten in Übersee*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto.

The book *Handbuch der deutschen Sprachen in Übersee* by Plewnia and Riehl, published in 2018, was conceived as a complementary resource to two handbooks about German-speaking minorities in Central and Eastern Europe (*Handbuch der mitteleuropäischen Sprachminderheiten* by Hinderling and Eichinger 1996; *Handbuch der deutschen Sprachminderheiten in Mittel- und Osteuropa* by Eichinger, Plewnia and Riehl 2008). It shows the current state of research in the field of German-speaking minorities in Africa, the Americas and Australia. In comparison to European linguistic minorities, these originated more recently, and in diverse ways.

The articles are consistent in their structure. The reader is first given crucial contextual information about the minority in question, including geographical, statistical and demographic data, as well as information about the historical development of the settlement and data about its economy, politics, culture and juridical status. In the second part the authors deal with language-specific aspects of the linguistic minority, from detailed descriptions of its language contact and the German language varieties that took part in them, to details about the speakers' language-use and attitudes to language.

The present review is designed as a suggestion for cross-reading, each section dealing with one of the following aspects in a country comparison: chronology of immigration movements; characteristics of the group, such as professions and their influence on its economic situation; religion as a factor in language retention; language contact phenomena; and efforts at language retention/current speaker situation.

### **1. Time and type of immigration (chronology)**

As mentioned in the introduction, relatively recent immigration is a commonality among language minorities overseas, in comparison to language minorities in Europe. Nevertheless, the former show great variation in terms of *how* recently they immigrated, as well as in terms of group composition and size, which are influenced by the motive for emigration. While rather selective emigration is observed early on, larger groups follow in search of a better life, be it due to religious persecution or difficult conditions in the country of origin.

Major waves of immigration were often preceded by a smaller number of individual forerunners, who could be of different kinds. Hans Staden published a first report on the experiences of his trip to South America as early as 1557 (Rosenberg, p. 195). Oceania's first contacts with German sailors on merchant ships, whaling vessels or scientific expeditions took place between the 17th and early 19th centuries, at first without settlement (Engelberg, p. 37). German immigration to North America began with the first settlements around 1683 (Keel, p. 139). These and later settlers, like the Amish (Tomas, p. 156) and the Mennonites (Siemens, p. 267), fled religious intolerance to what would later become the USA. At the beginning of the 19th century, Germans were among the first settlers – as well as the first prisoners – in Australia (Riehl, p. 12).

For the larger settlement groups, emigration can often be linked to historical conditions in the country of origin. The Thirty Years' War, for example, encouraged emigration to South Africa, with up to 15,000 Germans arriving there before 1789 (Harr, 85). Interestingly, these were mostly men who entered into mixed marriages with women of other nationalities, whereby German could not establish itself as the family language. Likewise, from the early 18th century onwards, various missionary societies settled in South Africa, followed by farmers. These settlements were able to preserve the German language for a long time through German-speaking schools and municipalities.

Throughout the 19th century, the South Pacific was a focus of economic interest (Engelberg, p. 38). The trade in products such as copra, cotton, coffee and cocoa was at times dominated by German trading companies (e.g. in Tonga), and Samoa was declared a German colony. In Latin America, German settlements in Brazil began in 1818 (Rosenberg, p. 217), in Chile in 1846 (Rosenberg, p. 206) and in Argentina in 1877/78 (Rosenberg, p. 202). The active population policy of these countries, who declared their independence in the beginning of the 19th century, encouraged settlement in closed groups, who were promised the possibility to preserve their German culture and language. From 1844 on, the German Empire took over the South Pacific area of German New Guinea and Samoa, resulting in increased missionary work by various religious communities. This in turn promoted further immigration of settlers, and finally also the introduction of German in schools, as a subject and as a language of teaching (Engelberg, pp. 42). The first group of 486 Old Lutherans settled in Australia in 1838 (Riehl, p. 12). Similarly, German immigration to Namibia began in 1842 with missionary work by the Rhenish Missionary Society, which was particularly marked by its status as a German colony between 1884 and 1915/20 (Dück, p. 113). In a US-wide comparison, German immigration to Texas occurred relatively late, namely in the late 1820s (Boas, p. 174). However, immigration

to the United States was particularly high shortly before the turn of the 19th century, with 1,455,181 immigrants between 1880 and 1889 (Keel, p. 139).

The two World Wars had drastic effects on the German language worldwide, which can be observed in two directions. On the one hand, many German speakers were led to seek their fortune overseas in a new wave of emigration; on the other hand, language-political restrictions in destination countries now at war with Germany caused deep cuts. There were particularly large waves of immigration to Latin America: between 35,000 and 45,000 German-speaking Jews and other political refugees emigrated to Argentina alone during the Nazi era (Rosenberg, p. 203), whereas in the postwar period several Latin American countries harbored Nazi criminals, in distinction. On the other hand, German emigration to Australia was banned between 1919 and 1925 in the wake of the First World War (Riehl, p. 13). When Brazil declared war on Germany in 1917, all activities in German were banned (Rosenberg, p. 221). In Oceania, too, the situation changed with the beginning of World War I. Depending on the region, German settlers were either deported, left the country themselves, or tried to assimilate (New Zealand) (Engelberg, pp. 44).

In present times, emigration overseas no longer takes place in waves, and no longer involves agricultural settlement, but individuals do continue to immigrate to Australia as well as South Africa and Latin America. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the use of the German language continues. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2000 there were about 42.8 million people of German origin living in the United States (15.2% of the total population), but as of 2012 only 1 million German speakers could be identified as native speakers (Keel, pp. 137). The development seems to be different in New Zealand, where although German immigration only began to rise again in the 1990s, it did so in such a way that German was also found in public use (Engelberg, pp. 44).

The waves of migration of Mennonites from Flanders, Holland, Friesland and Northern Germany should be presented separately for the sake of clarity. This migratory path begins in 1530 with emigration to the Spitt (West Prussia) from 1789 on to Chortitzta in the Ukraine, from 1873 to Manitoba (Canada), and finally from 1922 via Chihuahua (Mexico) and Menno (Paraguay) to Belize, Texas (USA) and Santa Cruz (Bolivia) (Siemens, p. 287). The main reason for this pattern is the incompatibility between the group's pacifist attitude and the political demands of the surrounding area, primarily military service.

## 2. Type and composition of the settlement

The authors of the individual articles emphasize the type of settlement, as well as the composition of the settling group, as important factors for language preservation or language change. The type of settlement varies – individuals or groups, isolated in rural areas or experiencing urban contact. The settlements may be composed of a rather homogeneous group of speakers who keep their common variety active through regular use, whereas heterogeneous groups tend to agree on mixed forms or a standard emerges, which means that the original variety is pushed into the background.

The first settlers in Australia were from southwestern and southeastern Germany, but in the 19th century they were mainly from the north and northeast, including Silesia and North Prussia (Riehl, p. 12). There were manifold types of settlement. On the one hand, there were Old Lutherans and common people who went to the countryside as farmers and established their own towns (e.g. Adelaide). On the other hand, about 6,000 German men immigrated to work in the gold mines. Since the proportion of women was very low, mixed marriages were pervasive, with the result German did not prevail as a family language (Riehl, p. 13).

In Namibia, the majority of immigrants came from northern Germany, and the large number of northern German varieties they brought with them meant that the speakers formed a standard everyday variety with a northern German influence. In addition to mineral resources such as diamonds, uranium, copper and zinc, Namibia benefits from a productive market economy consisting of fishing, agriculture and tourism, in addition to mining. Medium-sized businesses and companies run by Germans are integrated into the Namibian economy, especially in the cities of Swakopmund and Windhoek, where ethnic Germans make up about one percent of the population (Dück, pp. 114). The large proportion of tourists from Germany, in particular, led to the preservation of and positive attitude towards the German language, despite the country's colonial history.

German language users in the United States can be divided into several groups. On the one hand, there are heterogeneous settlement compositions, whose varieties of origin are North German, East Frisian, Westphalian, Central German, East Middle German and Upper German dialects. Where speakers of different varieties lived together, a different colloquial German was spoken in each case (Keel, pp. 146). Texas German can be cited as a concrete example. Here, the linguistic origin of the German-speaking immigrants was very heterogeneous compared to elsewhere. The large number of German varieties and the relatively short period of 80 years during which German was in dominant use did not lead to the development of a separate Texas

variety (Boas, p. 180). The case of Pennsylvania-German is different. It was formed by members of the early Anabaptist movement from the regions of today's Palatinate, southern Germany and northern Switzerland. In the rural areas, the settlers mainly worked in agriculture. This is still the case among the Amish, who continue to reject technological development (Tomas, pp. 157), in contrast to the Hutterites, who did incorporate new agricultural technologies and were therefore better able to switch to other economic sectors (e.g. furniture production, metalworking).

In Oceania, settler varieties include Low German on New Zealand's South Island and Egerland Northbavarian, concentrated on New Zealand's North (Engelberg, p. 64). Sugar cane plantations in Hawaii drew a wave of immigration from northwest Germany (1881-1895, about 1,400 settlers). New Zealand, which recruited for colonial development, has a special position. These settlers mainly originated from Northern Germany (Mecklenburg, Hamburg, Bremen, Hanover, Holstein, West Prussia), but also from Bohemia, the Rhineland and Bavaria. There were also Swiss, Austrian and bilingual Polish immigrants. Over twenty settlements formed, where immigrants built farms, cultivated wine and hops or tried their luck in the gold mines. Germans also lived in urban spaces, working as craftsmen or entrepreneurs.

In Latin America, each region has to be regarded separately. Immigration to Brazil was predominantly rural: small farmers, craftsmen, doctors, pastors and teachers were invited to settle the land and develop it for agriculture. In Chile, the origin of the first immigrants can be periodized very precisely: in the 1860s immigrants originated in Hesse, Saxony, Swabia, Silesia and Bohemia; in 1863 a Catholic group arrived from Westphalia; and in 1875 a group of Austrian immigrants arrived (Rosenberg, p. 208). While immigrants to Chile came mainly from the lower middle class, they also included educated German-speaking Jews. A large percentage of immigrants to Argentina also had commercial and industrial skills, especially in the urban Buenos Aires. Volga Germans and Black Sea Germans dominated language use in Argentina (Rosenberg, p. 254). The contribution by Rosenberg includes a detailed appendix with information on Belize, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Colombia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Rosenberg, pp. 254-263).

### **3. Religion as a factor in migration and language preservation**

Religion appears repeatedly in the contributions in the context of two different functions, namely as a driver of migration and as a factor for preserving language. In Australia, for example, until 1851 half of the immigrants had left German-speaking areas for religious

reasons (Riehl, p. 12). In Brazil, too, the isolated location of the settlements often led to church congregations (mostly of Lutheran origin) being the only institutions that contributed to language preservation through schools and church services (Rosenberg, pp. 217).

In the United States, too, immigrants from rural areas settled mainly in groups of their own religious affiliation, because church infrastructure made an important contribution to the founding and development of the communities (Keel, pp. 134). Even before the First World War, however, church communities' fear that young people would migrate to English-speaking congregations led to services being held in English. With regard to Pennsylvania-German, a long language tradition and even a separate diasystem can be observed. The religious communities of the Amish had been living in relative seclusion in rural areas of the US, which allowed the development of their own diasystem, Pennsylvania-German (PeD). While colloquial communication takes place in PeD, knowledge of High German from the church context was usually exclusively passive. The Amish also use English, previously in contact with the outside world and nowadays also in their own schools (Tomas, p. 162).

Changes of language among the Mennonite groups are particularly interesting. After many generations during which Plautdietsch was retained, in the United States the younger generation seems to be slowly assimilating to the majority language, whereas the same generation in Spanish-speaking countries has a better command of Plautdietsch and High German than of Spanish (Siemens, pp. 288-290).

A special position is held by the missions based in Oceania, some of which were allowed to stay in the country (in New Guinea; Engelberg, p. 44) even after the World Wars, and are still active today, whereas immigrants who were not bound to institutions had to leave the country. In Namibia the service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELKIN) is still held in German in about 15 congregations, as well as Roman Catholic services being held in German in about 3 parishes. Nevertheless, the number of speakers is declining.

#### **4. Specific examples of contact phenomena**

Regarding contact phenomena, the countries described display some common characteristics. Two factors play an important role here: the composition of the speaker group, and how isolated its settlements are. These factors determine whether the linguistic minorities develop their own variety, for example Barossa German (Australia), Unserdeutsch/Rabaul Creole German (German New Guinea), Springbok German (South Africa) and Namdeutsch/Namibian

German (Namibia) – as well as whether they do so on the basis of High German or a regional variety.

New circumstances promote, in particular, lexical borrowings from the contact languages. For example, South African Springbok German includes borrowings from English with and without assimilation: ‘Jam’, ‘Fenz’ (engl. *fence*); as well as neologisms: ‘Grosskinder’ (engl. *grandchildren*); and borrowings from Afrikaans: ‘vor dass’ from *voordat* for ‘before’ (Harr, pp. 93). Namibian German also contains the same contact languages and partly identical examples, such as the use of ‘jam’ from the English word or ‘mooi’ (engl. *beautiful*) from Afrikaans (Dücker, pp. 122). Borrowings from English are particularly popular in the United States, such as the unsurprising use of ‘to behave’ instead of the German *sich verhalten*: ‘Der hot sich gut behoove/beheeft’ and, in Pennsylvania German, ‘I bin in d Schtor (engl. *store*) ganga und hob ebbas gkauft fir breakfast’ (Tomas, p. 163). In Texas-German, too, there are borrowings at the lexical level of flora and fauna, and even of discourse markers (‘Un denn abends of course die Kieh z’melken’; Boas, p. 181). The influence of local languages can also be found in the language use of Oceanians, such as ‘Aiga’ (engl. *family*) in the Samoan context or in examples that draw on cultural specifics (‘Una’ for engl. *supervisor*; Engelberg, pp. 64). Semantic transfer can also be observed in the vocabulary of Australian Barossa German where there exists a strong variation between the speakers and family-specific idiolects, for example ‘the Roode’ (engl. *road*) (Riehl, pp. 20).

However, the influence of language contact can also work the other way around, from the immigrant language to the local languages, for example during the colonial period in German New Guinea (‘aihanapana’ in German *Eisenbahn*) or in South Pacific toponyms like ‘Kaiserin-Augustina-Fluss’ (Engelberg, p. 65).

On the **phonetic** level, parallels can be drawn between the influences on spoken varieties, for example in Australia and Texas. In both cases, this happened through the linguistic contact with English, for example in the rounding of the vowels [y] and [ø] can be seen (Texas: Boas, p. 183; Australia: Riehl, p. 20). For the USA as a whole, the influence of the pronunciation of the liquid /l/ and /r/ on the German varieties is mentioned (Keel, 147). A special case in South Africa is Springbok-German, which, due to its isolated location, has taken on characteristic features of Low German such as st- as [st-] and sp- as [sp-] (Harr, p. 93).

On the level of **morphosyntax**, simplification phenomena predominate as a result of language contact. For example, the Australian Barossa-German is characterized by the avoidance of the

pleasure mark by zero articles or plural use and case dismantling. Specific to Barossa German is the *tun*-periphrase, which in Riehl's corpus appears especially in the past: 'Sie tate vorlesen weil ich stricken tate.' (Riehl, p. 24). The Oceanic 'Unserdeutsch'/Rabaul Creole German also has strongly reduced flexion: 'du geht wo?' (Engelberg, p. 60).

In the South African Springbok-German, there is an extension of the 'um...zu' construction for which Standard German speakers would use 'zu'-infinitives: 'Er probiert um dem Vater zu helfen' (Harr, p. 96). As already mentioned, no singular variety could develop in Texas due to the large number of German dialects, but case syncretism or the reduction of plural morphology can nevertheless be found (Boas, p. 185). A phenomenon unique to Pennsylvania-German, on the other hand, is the formation of an *am*-progressive as a verbal paradigm, which even includes passive-capable progressive-constructions and is also recognized as standard-conforming (as yet in contrast to Standard German): 'D Anne is am Appl schala'. (engl.: *Anne is peeling apples*); 'Fiel Haisa sin am ufgeduhn warra do in d letscht Zeet' (engl. *Many houses are being built here recently*) (Tomas, pp. 166).

Latin America provides some examples of language contact phenomena at the level of the caption. The Argentinean-German variety with numerous Spanish and old Russian borrowings ("double emigration from the Rhine to the Volga and from the Volga to the Rio de la Plata" (Schmidt 1996, 204) has developed its own form of lettering to enhance its prestige according to Spanish orthographic standards: 'Trink, trink, priderlain trink. Lass doj di Sorguen tzú Haus.' (Rosenberg, p. 205). In Brazil, the varieties Hunsrückisch and Pommeranian have, depending on the region, initiated a co-official status and a great discussion about norms of transcription ensued (Rosenberg, pp. 237).

Namibia and German New Guinea are worth discussing in more detail, if we are to do justice to the complexity of the language contact and the importance of individual factors. Namibia is a multi-ethnic state where multilingualism is part of everyday life, with English as the only official language and 11 national languages (among them German). Although instruction in German was prohibited between 1915 (end of the German colony) and 1945 (end of the Second World War), there are now 5 PASCH schools and the German Higher Private School, where approximately 9,000 students are taught German as their mother tongue and/or as a foreign language. Numerous associations and institutions promote an active cultural life, including even a Windhoek Carnival on the Rhenish model, celebrated since 1953. Contact languages for the approx. 22,000 speakers of Namibian German are mainly English as the official language, and Afrikaans as lingua franca. The deviation from Standard German, which

mainly takes place on a lexical level, is recognized as a separate variety, which is also used in writing, at school, in the media and at the Namibian university, and has an identity-forming effect. Namslang has been used especially among young people, where the density of language mixture, especially with English, is significantly higher: 'Oukie, alles alright bei dir?' ('Oukie': afr. *ou*, 'guy, dude'; Dück, p. 125). Similarly, the 'Küchendeutsch'/Namibian Black German is considered a restricted German contact variety, created by the asymmetrical work relations during colonialism. It is not very prestigious, and is slowly dying out due to social changes.

Another special case, although different, is 'Unserdeutsch'/Rabaul Creole German, a Creole language that emerged from the activities of the Catholic mission in German New Guinea. Since 1891, the missionaries taught local children or children from mixed marriages in boarding schools, with as little contact with their parents as possible. In other contexts such as trade and plantations, the English-based Tok Pisin was a common means of communication. At school all subjects were taught in German, but outside the classroom the pupils mixed languages. Even after the change to Australian administration from World War I onwards, students continued to learn German, and many started families whose family language was Unserdeutsch/Rabaul Creole German. Since World War II, however, the prohibition on German as a language of instruction, as well as increased mobility and marriages outside the group, have slowly dissolved the speaker group (Engelberg, p. 58-60).

## **5. Efforts towards language retention / current speaker situation / language competence**

As seen in the previous sections, the type of settlement and its composition are important contributing factors to language preservation. Also important, however, is the infrastructure, which church institutions once established or continue to maintain in the region, often concretely in the form of schools. In connection with print media, communities' own newspapers or ones purchased from Germany also play a role, as do new immigrants. In most contributions, the use of German or a German variety is described as being in steady decline, despite many measures to the contrary. In Australia, it used to be schools and magazines that were expected to contribute to language preservation. Today there are still male choirs and clubs, as well as the Barossa German Language Association, but German is only taught as a foreign language (for up to two years). The use of German is therefore limited to the oldest generation, or is the family language of new immigrants (Riehl, pp. 14).

In Oceania, settlement situations often made it difficult to maintain the language. In principle, Oceania is multilingual, so that the speakers had a functionally differentiated repertoire of languages/varieties at their disposal, depending on their needs. Repertoires consisted of English, a native language, and pidgins (Engelberg, p. 70).

In the USA, the isolation of rural German-speaking settlements and the use of Standard German in schools and church communities contributed to the preservation of the language. Legislation introducing English as a school language in the 19th century, as well as increasing mobility through railroads and later motorways, gradually led to triglossia (dialect at home, Standard German in the church community, and English for outside contact), and in later generations to the dominant use of English. The number of German-language periodicals has declined from over 800 before the First World War to only about a dozen today. However, the number of heritage societies for the cultivation of German culture and language is growing (Keel, p. 143). Texas German is also clearly declining, from a peak of 100,000 speakers before the First World War to about 70,000 in the 1960s and down to an estimated 8,000-10,000 in the beginning of the 21st century; it is expected to have no speakers by 2030 (Boas, p. 177). Factors in the decline include language use being restricted to the family context, negative connotations due to the two World Wars, migration to cities, and mixed marriages. According to the 2009 census (Tomas, p. 157), about 344,000 Americans are descended from Pennsylvania Germans. While the number of Amish is rapidly increasing, and the diasystem therefore remains active, other ethnic Germans integrated into American society and show a long-term tendency to change language due to the more prestigious status of English.

South Africa has 11 official national languages, with Zulu, English and Afrikaans considered the three *linguae francae*, and English as the country's dominant language. German language use remains active through Lutheran churches and schools but tends to decline due to mixed marriages and migration to urban centres. Nowadays, elementary school education is taught in English or Afrikaans, but there are some private and state elementary schools in which German is the language of instruction, as well as four German schools supported by the Federal Republic of Germany, and German as a foreign language at 13 universities. However, the use of German is in decline; fewer and fewer German speakers are enrolling in these schools and the number of German students has decreased by 357 to about 1,000 between 2005 and 2010 (Harr, p. 89). The supply of newspapers and magazines is also decreasing, but the online weekly newspaper 'Kap-Express' is still well-known, and media from Germany is of course also directly accessible online. The language competence of German-speakers is mostly quadrilingual: English, Afrikaans, German and Zulu, the latter limited to speakers who

grew up on farms, which is becoming increasingly rare. Use of German is limited to schools, whereas in the community and in the family Springbok German is spoken more commonly.

In Argentina today, the speech islands are bilingual, but speakers in urban areas are usually already linguistically assimilated. After the Second World War, German was still the family language of 300,000 speakers, but this number is currently estimated at 200,000. In Brazil, Decree 7387 (Presidência da República do Brasil 2010) contributed to the recognition of multilingualism in terms of language policy, enabling the co-officialization of indigenous or migration-related minority languages, such as Hunsrückisch, Pomeranian and German, in various communities (Rosenberg, p. 236)

Namibia should be mentioned as a special case in the context of language preservation among German language minorities overseas: there are today about 22,000 speakers of Namibian German as their first language. Due to the variety being lexically different from standard German, as well as to positive language attitudes, anchoring in the school system, and continued immigration, Namibian German is used in both informal and formal contexts and is therefore not threatened with extinction (Dück, pp. 126-128).

## **6. Conclusion**

In addition to the above-mentioned thematic priorities (time of immigration, type and composition of the settlement, religion as a factor in language preservation, concrete language contact phenomena, and attempts to preserve language/current speaker situation), the authors of the volume also look at language settings/identification. Here, limited space only allows us to summarize that although many people like to refer to their German roots (in some cases even despite the aggravating political past), their 'new' homeland plays a larger role in their identity formation.

The authors of the handbook succeed in bringing the individual regions, which are described in great detail, closer to readers interested in contact phenomena as well as in history. The readability of the text is consistently maintained, allowing readers to go on an exciting trip overseas from the comfort of their desks.

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