

Language formation
as identity formation:
The case of Unserdeutsch
(Rabaul Creole German)

Mag. Martina Anissa Strommer
Department of German Studies
University of Vienna, Austria

Outline

- Introduction
- History and origin of RCG
- Theories of origin
- Hypotheses
- Conclusion

Functions of language

- Descriptive
- Directive
- Instructive
- Metalinguistic
- Contactual
- Expressive
- **Isolative: exclude unwanted recipients**

(Möhn & Pelka 1984: 6ff)

Imagined Communities

Much the most important thing about language is its capacity for generating imagined communities (Anderson 1983: 133).

History and origin

1897: Boarding school for “half-white children”
founded in Vunapope by Missionaries of the
Sacred Heart

1910: Former students move to Rabaul

1945: Emigration to Australia

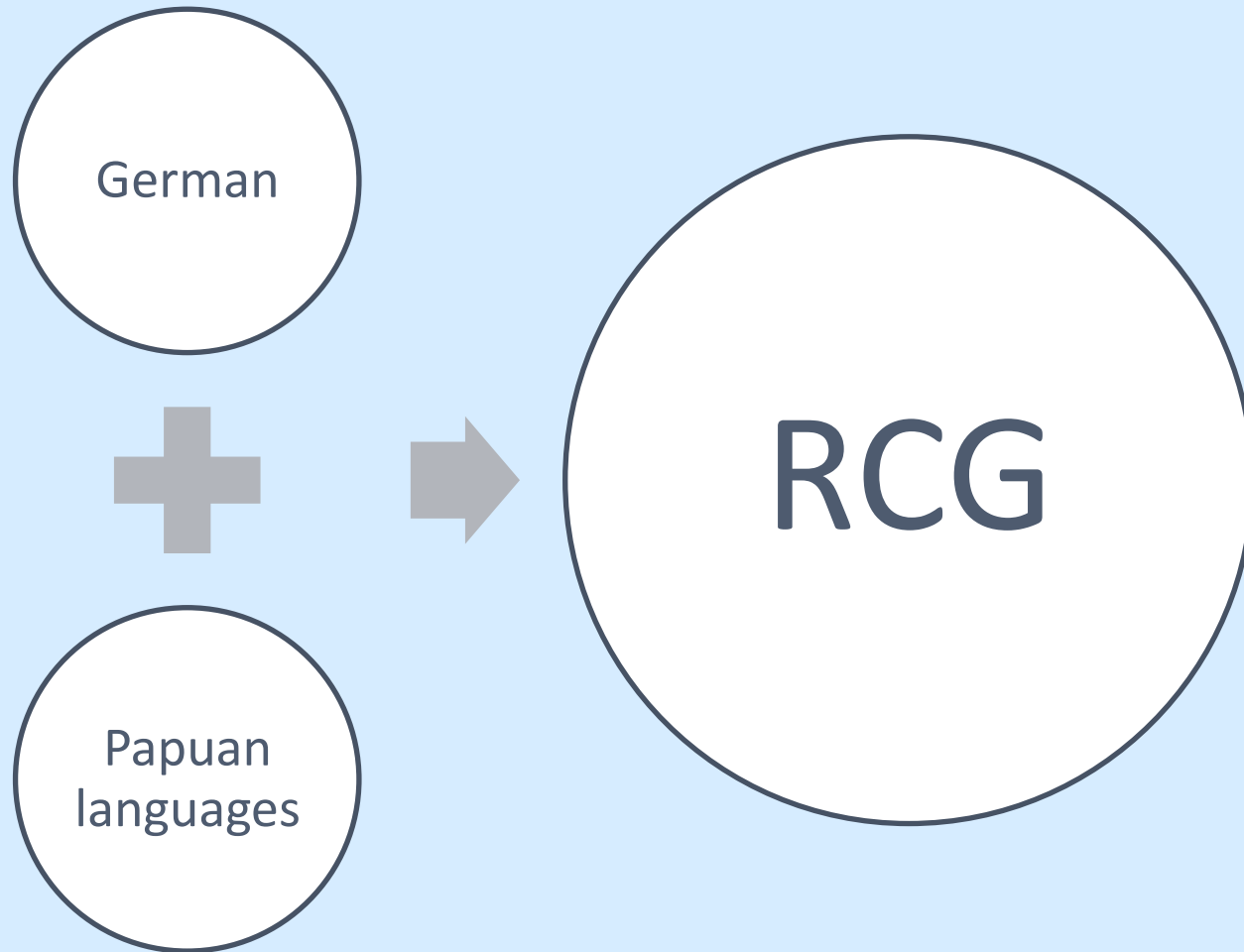


Die Grundschule der halbweißen Mädchen.

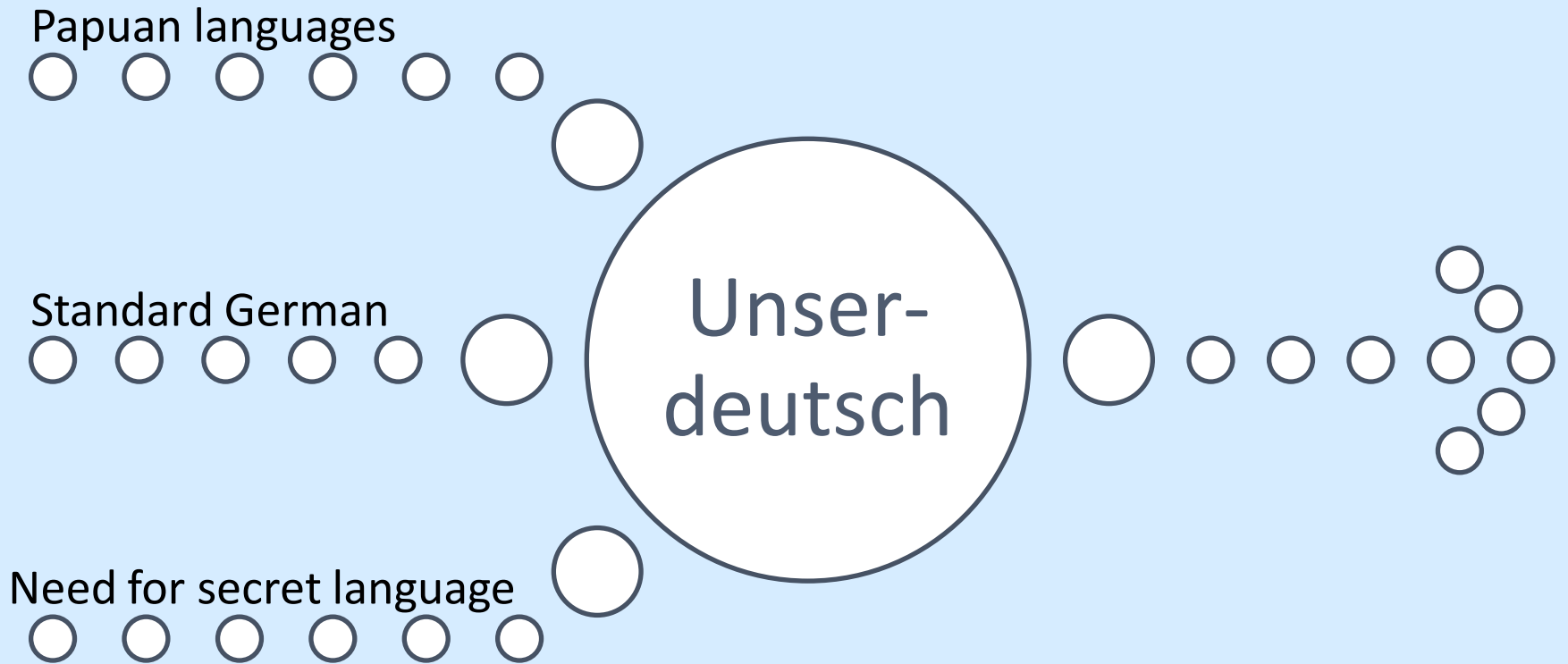


The Halbweissen Knaben

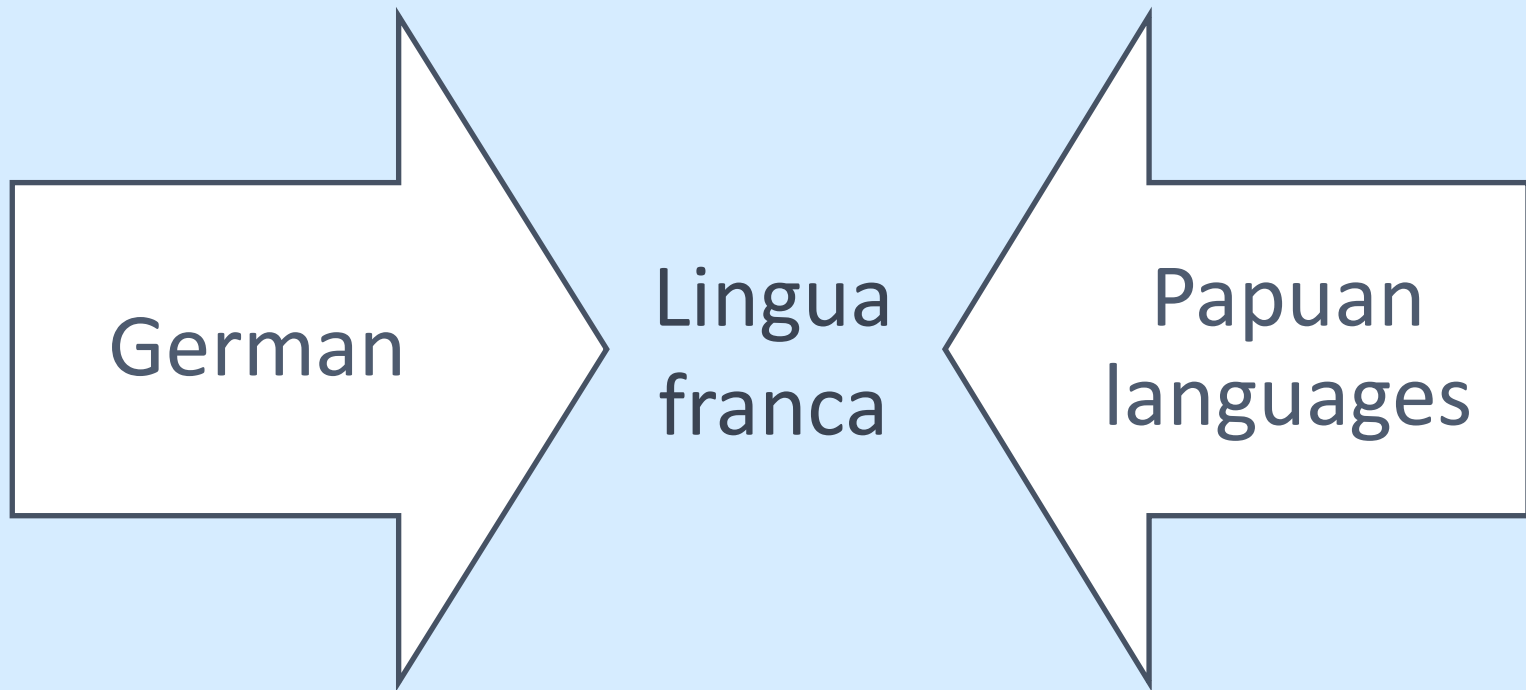
Theories of origin I



Theories of origin II



Theories of origin III



Hypothesis I

Creating RCG was an act of indigenous resistance and anti-colonial struggle.

(Cf. Scott 1985)

Hypothesis II

RCG served as a “third space” for the children, providing an alternative to the dichotomy of Papuan vs. German, black vs. white. Using elements from various Papuan and European languages, RCG perfectly resembles the mixed ethnic background of its speakers, unifying them at the same time.

(Cf. Spivak 1988, Bhabha 1993, Fanon 2008)

Hypothesis III

The children were separated from their mothers at a very young age and had never met their fathers. Among the students, a sense of non-belonging was dominant, so creating RCG was an attempt to create an identity.

(Cf. Halliday 1976)

Hypothesis IV

RCG is a learner language: The children did not master Standard German, so they labeled their corrupted version of it “Unserdeutsch”.

(Cf. Bhabha 1993)

Hypthesis V

The children needed to communicate important information without being understood by the European missionaries. To this end, they created RCG as a secret code.

(Cf. Halliday 1976)

Conclusion

No mono-causal explanation for RCG

Isolative function has always been central

Works cited

- Anderson, Benedict (1983): *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso.
- Bhabha, Homi K. (1993): *The Location of Culture*. London, New York: Routledge Classics.
- Fanon, Frantz (2008): *Black skin, white masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- Halliday, Michael Alexander Kirkwood (1976): *Anti-Languages*. In: *American Anthropologist* 78(3), 570-584.
- Janssen, Arnold (1932): *Die Erziehungsanstalt für halbweiße Kinder*. In: Hüsken, Joseph (ed.): *Pioniere der Südsee: Werden und Wachsen der Herz-Jesu-Mission*. Salzburg: Hilstrup, 150-155.
- Möhn, Dieter; Pelka, Roland (1984): *Fachsprachen. Eine Einführung*. Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Scott, James C. (1990): *Weapons of the weak. Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988): *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In: Nelson, Cary; Grossberg, Lawrence (ed.): *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. London: Macmillan, 271-313.
- Volker, Craig A. (1991): *The Birth and Decline of Rabaul Creole German*. In: *Language and Linguistics in Melanesia* 22, 143-156.

Thank you for your attention!

anissa.strommer@gmail.com