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Etymology and Pidgin languages: Words of German origin in Tok Pisin

The Institute of the German Language in Mannheim is currently developing an internet portal for German loanwords in other languages (lwp.ids-mannheim.de). The portal collects bilingual loanword dictionaries and implements complex search options for borrowing processes filtered by grammatical, temporal, semantic and other parameters.

One of the dictionaries that is currently being compiled for the portal is the *Internet Dictionary of Words of German Origin in Tok Pisin* (TP), the main pidgin language of Papua New Guinea. The German influence onto TP has its roots in the German colonial empire, when TP played an important role as a lingua franca in the colony of German New Guinea.

As a pidgin language, TP poses particular problems for etymological research: In its early stages it was unstable, the speakers spoke different native languages and TP as a second language, words varied phonetically according to the origin of the speakers, and there is no inherited vocabulary that forms the background for borrowing processes. Besides Austronesian and Papuan languages, several non-local languages have contributed to the lexicon of Tok Pisin, in particular English (80%), German, and Bazaar Malay, which itself had integrated many Dutch and English loanwords. The existence of Dutch-German-English cognates often makes it difficult to establish the origin of TP words. In some cases, phonetic adaptation strategies of TP point to a specific origin, in other cases the lexicon of older Pacific pidgins provide hints, and often knowledge about particular historical circumstances reveals the origin of a TP word. Nevertheless, in many cases, a multiple origin has to be assumed, or at least a strengthening effect of, e. g., German on the establishment of English loans in TP that had already been in use in pre-TP pidgins.

The talk will briefly present the lexicographic enterprise and then focus on the problems of etymological reasoning specific to the pidgin language under investigation.