

German koines: artificial and natural

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Introduction

My definition of a koine is adapted from Siegel's excellent discussion of this notion (1985) to cater for the special characteristics of German koines. The properties of a koine include the following:

a. It is mutually intelligible with the acrolectal language to which it is related.

b. It is structurally reduced and simplified.

c. It incorporates some degree of dialect mixing and dialect leveling.

d. Its users include significant groups of non-native speakers.

There are two characteristics that are not distinctive factors of koines that are nevertheless useful for purposes of my present discussion:

e. It is typically transplanted to areas not adjacent with an area of currency of the related acrolect.

f. It may exhibit some degree of human agency or deliberate planning.

This last point is emphasised by Pei (1966: 139) who refers to koines as "a deliberately sought sublimation of the constituent dialects rather than an unconscious accidental merger."

In the light of this definition it follows that I shall have little to say about the leveling of German dialects and the emergence of a standard language within Germany. Rather, I shall concentrate on the brief period of German colonization overseas (1880–1919) and the attempt to develop an artificial German Koine for Germany's colonies. In doing this I hope to revive the rather limited discussion of overseas varieties of German begun in publications such as Moloney et al. (1977) and Auburger (1979).

Background

Up to German unification in 1871, state-controlled German colonization took place only in Eastern Europe where Germany by that date had