

Colognian

Kölsch

Native to	Germany
Region	Cologne and environs
Native speakers	(250,000 cited 1997) ^[1] Indo-European
Language family	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ West Germanic<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ High German<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Central German<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ West Central German<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Central Franconian<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Ripuarian<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Kölsch

Language codes

ISO 639-3 [ksh](#)

The **Colognian dialect**, or **Kölsch** is a variety of the [German language](#). People in and around the city of [Cologne](#) in the West of [Germany](#) use Kölsch. Nowadays most of them have [High German](#) as their [primary language](#) or [secondary language](#).

Usage

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About 250,000 people actively speak Kölsch. More than 2,500,000 people understand Kölsch well and use some Kölsch, or a variant, somehow. An estimated 20,000,000 to 30,000,000 people understand it partially.

Pronunciation

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How to say "Kölsch"? Take the beginning from "kernel" or "colonel"; next take a real dark, long "l" as in "bold", or "ball"; then append a "sh" as in "shrimps", or "ti" as in "nation". That's the sound "Kölsch". However, the German "ö" is not exactly the same as an English "o", but a sound between "o" and "e".

Etymology

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The word 'Kölsch' comes from the Name of the City of Cologne. It is 'Köln' in native tongue, yet 'Kölle' in Kölsch. By ordinary German word building rules, 'kölnisch' means 'belonging to Cologne', 'related to Cologne', 'in Cologne', 'from Cologne'—as in 'kölnisch Wasser' ([Eau de Cologne](#)). The word 'kölnisch', or 'köllesch', shortened to 'kölsch' in local tongue, became a shorthand noun for the [local beer](#) and the local language, or dialect.

Today's name of the city stems from ancient times of the [Roman occupation](#) of Northern Germany 100 years before Christ, and later. The Romans built a [fort](#) or [castle](#) —then, approximately under the reign of [Julius Caesar](#), turned it into a colony ([Latin](#): *colonia*) with religious and city rights. Part of its Roman name stuck, 'Colonia Clavdia Ara Agrippinensium Oppidum Vbiorum' became 'Köln' over the centuries.

History

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Although Kölsch speakers occasionally claim that it is rooted in pre-Roman times, Kölsch developed from a mix of [Lower German](#) and [Middle High German](#) in [medieval](#) times. It learned from other languages through political and trade connections during the times of the [Hansa](#), and from various waves of immigration. In modern times, there were:

- Remarkable [French](#) influences since [Napoleon](#)'s occupation of the city (1794-1815)
- Prussian influences as Prussian kings took over from the French army
- [Dutch](#) influences by immigration, trade, and neighborhood
- Some [English](#) influences through the [British](#) and [American](#) armies, [European integration](#) and worldwide [globalization](#) since 1945
- Recently minor influences by migrants from Southern [Europe](#) and [Turkey](#) start evolving

Special properties

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Kölsch has outstanding or unique properties. Here are some:

- Richness. There is only one language in Europe that has as many different vowels as Kölsch. There are a huge number of different sounds that sound like 'sh', but if someone gets them wrong, he will be understood as a foreigner.
- Tolerance paired with individuality. Kölsch is not so outstanding among the many dialects around it. These are both similar and different. Kölsch integrates new variants and deviations easily and quickly. There is no concept of right or wrong, only of difference. It is all right to be different, as every individual is different somehow all the time.
- Kölsch is unusually well documented. Some linguists of the local universities have shown great interest in Kölsch and other local dialects, and research on them. Outside the world of science, the [Akademie für uns Kölsche Sproch](#) (*Academy in favour of our Kölsch*

language) offers regular courses, classes, excursions for everybody. They publish a dictionary, a grammar, and phrase books. It is probably the only institute of its kind in the world.

Socio-cultural

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After the Second World War, Cologne took up and integrated a huge number of former inhabitants from the former East German regions, which now are part of Poland. That has not had a big impact on the Kölsch language; but it has on the immigrants. They soon began to integrate into the social life and otherwise, they began to learn Kölsch. Naturally they were not perfect speakers at first. The Kölsch language recognized that, and quickly created a word for them: "imi" ('imitating' or 'imitated' Kölsch). As they learned Kölsch well over the years, you could hear the word 'imi' less often. It came back when the wall that separated East and West Germany was taken down.

People who speak Kölsch

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- [Jacques Offenbach](#), (1819-1880), cellist, composer, initiator of the genre '[operetta](#)'
- [Konrad Adenauer](#), (1876-1967), Cologne's mayor for long, later the first German [prime minister](#) ([chancellor](#)) after the second world war
- [Karl Blömer](#), body builder, awarded "[Mister Universum](#)"
- [Heinrich Böll](#), (1917-1985), writer and novelist, president of the German and the international [Pen Club](#), received the [nobel prize](#) for literature in the year 1972
- [Peter Müller](#) 'Dä Aap', (1927-1992), middle-weight boxing champion
- [Peter Ludwig](#), (1925-1996), industry leader, [patron](#) and [collector](#) of [modern art](#), founder of six important [museums](#) spread over Western Germany
- [Willy Millowitsch](#), (1909-1999), actor, TV-star, entertainer, proprietor of his own [theatre](#) in Cologne
- [Mario Adorf](#), (born 1930), actor and writer
- [Michael Schumacher](#), (born in 1969), [formula-one](#) car-racing world champion

Kölsch music

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- [Willi Ostermann](#), (1876-1936) was a [parodist](#), poet, composer, singer, songwriter, editor and [publisher](#). He is extremely popular in the Kölsch Region. He created a treasury of Kölsch songs. Many of Ostermann's songs are in everybody's active memory in Cologne and about. People sing them and music groups still perform them.
- [Kölsch-Rock](#) or [Kölschrock](#) is [rock music](#) in the language of the common people of [Cologne](#) and its surroundings. ^{[2][3][4]}

- de [Bläck Fööss](#) (the Naked Feet) were the first publicly recognized [beat band](#) to sing in Kölsch language. The professional musicians, successful in other projects, just for fun recorded a nice Kölsch song together, in 1969. The record became a little local success. Over the years, they had a series of local top hits, occasionally well received even outside the area where people understand Kölsch. Today they draw audiences of 20,000 or 30,000 people several times a year. Their repertoire covers most styles of modern popular music, and various language variants of Kölsch.
- [BAP](#) is a [Kölsch rock](#) group. They always have been a tour band and successfully perform throughout Germany.
- de [Höhner](#) (the Cocks and Hens) is a group playing popular, rock, beat, dancing, and drinking songs, almost all of them use an easy Kölsch. They have had a top hit in Germany and Number One at the [Oktoberfest](#) in [Munich](#). Munich is far away from Cologne; people in Munich have a completely different language, they usually do not understand Kölsch.
- [Can](#) was a [Kölsch rock](#)^{[[source?](#)]} group that got much international acclamation in the late 1960s, when they started a new style of [electronic music](#). General public became aware of them only about 20 years later. Then other musicians had successfully adopted their style. Most of their music is instrumental. If there is voice in their compositions, it is mostly used similar to any other instrument.

References

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

1. [↑](#) "[Ripuarian](#)". *Ethnologue*.
2. [↑](#) * [Frank Steffan](#): *Kölsch Rock*. Köln o. J. [1981]
3. [↑](#) * *Kölschrock*. In: [Rolf Hosfeld](#) (Hrsg.): *Kulturverführer Köln*. Helmut Metz Verlag, 2005 (2. akt. Aufl.), S. 48-49f.
4. [↑](#) * *Kölsch-Rock*. In: [Jürgen Raap](#): *Köln*. [Marco Polo Reiseführer](#), Lonely Planet, 2014, S. 21-22.

Other websites

[[change](#) | [change source](#)]

[Colognian edition](#) of [Wikipedia](#), the free encyclopedia

- [Moselfränkisches Wörterbuch \(Mosel-Frankian Dictionary, in German\)](#) [[permanent dead link](#)]
- [WiKoelsch Archived](#) 2006-12-24 at the [Wayback Machine](#) Test Wiki in Ripuarian languages, including Kölsch.

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