Denglisch (= Deutsch + Englisch):
Wenn Sprachen miteinander „kollidieren“

Denglish (= German + English): When Languages Collide

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Summary

Denglisch – Denglish – Neudeutsch: Some people claim that the words above all mean the same thing, but they don’t. Even the term “Denglisch” alone has several different meanings. Since the word “Denglis(c)h” is not found in German dictionaries (even recent ones), and “Neudeutsch” is vaguely defined as “die deutsche Sprache der neueren Zeit” (“the German language of more recent times”), it can be difficult to come up with a good definition.

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But here are five different definitions for Denglisch (or Denglish)\(^1\):

- **Denglisch 1**: The use of English words in German, with an attempt to incorporate them into German grammar. Examples: *downloaden – ich habe den File gedownloadet/downgeloadet.* - *Heute haben wir ein Meeting mit den Consultants.*

- **Denglisch 2**: The (excessive) use of English words, phrases, or slogans in German advertising. Example: A recent German magazine ad for the German airline Lufthansa prominently displays the slogan: “There’s no better way to fly.”

- **Denglisch 3**: The (bad) influences of English spelling and punctuation on German spelling and punctuation. One pervasive example: The incorrect use of an apostrophe in German possessive forms, as in Karl’s Schnellimbiss. This common error can be seen even on signs and painted on the side of trucks. It is even seen for plurals ending in s. Another example is a growing tendency to drop the hyphen (English–style) in German compound words: *Karl Marx Straße* vs *Karl-Marx-Straße*.

- **Denglisch 4**: The mixing of English and German vocabulary (in sentences) by English–speaking expats whose German skills are weak.

- **Denglisch 5**: The coining of faux English words that are either not found in English at all or are

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\(^1\) Some observers make a distinction between the use of anglicized words in German (*das Meeting = anglicism*) and Denglisch’s mixing of English words and German grammar (*Wir haben das gecancelt.*), especially when German equivalents are shunned. Although there is a technical difference (and a symantic one: Unlike “Anglizismus” in German, “Denglisch” usually has a negative, pejorative meaning.), I think such a distinction usually draws too fine a point; it is often difficult to decide whether a term is an anglicism or Denglisch.

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used with a different meaning than in German. Examples: *der Dressman* (male model), *der Smoking* (tuxedo), *der Talkmaster* (talk show host).

**Language Cross-Pollination**

There has always been a certain amount of language borrowing and “cross-pollination” among world languages. Historically, both English and German have borrowed heavily from Greek, Latin, French, and other languages. English has German loan words such as *angst, gemütlich, kindergarten, masochism,* and *schadenfreude,* usually because there is no true English equivalent.

But in recent years, particularly following the Second World War, German has intensified its borrowings from English. As English has become the dominant world language for science and technology (areas that German itself once dominated) and business, German, more than any other European language, has adopted even more English vocabulary. Although some people object to this, most German-speakers do not. Unlike the French and *Franglais,* very few German-speakers seem to perceive the invasion of English as a threat to their own language. (Even in France, such objections seem to have done little to stop English words like *le weekend* from creeping into French.) True, there are several small language organizations in Germany that see themselves as guardians of the German language and try to wage war against English — with little success to date. English terms are perceived as trendy or “cool” in German; by the way, English “cool” is cool in German, too.

**English Influences on German**

But many well-educated Germans shudder at what they view as the “bad” influences of English in today’s German. Dramatic proof of this tendency can be seen in the popularity of Bastian Sick’s humorous bestselling book entitled *Der Dativ ist dem Genitiv sein Tod* (“the dative [case] will be the death of the genitive”). Sick’s 2004 bestseller (another English word used in German) points out the deterioration of the German language (“Sprachverfall”), caused in part by bad English influences. The success of the first book brought about two sequels: *Folgen 2 und 3,* Parts 2 and 3, “Neues/Noch mehr aus dem Irrgarten der deutschen Sprache” (“new things/even more from the German-language maze”).

Although not all of German’s problems can be blamed on Anglo-American influences, many of them can. It is in the areas of business and technology in particular that the invasion of English is most pervasive. A German business person may attend *einen Workshop* (der) or *go to ein Meeting* (das) where there’s *eine Open-End-Diskussion* about the company’s *Performance* (die). He or she reads Germany’s popular *Manager-Magazin* (das) in order to learn how to *managen* the *Business* (das). At their *Job* (der) many people work *am Computer* (der) and visit *das Internet* by going *online.*

While there are perfectly good German words for all of the “English” words above, they just aren’t “in” (as they say in German, or “Deutsch ist out.”). A rare exception is the German word for computer, *der Rechner,* which enjoys parity with *der Computer,* first invented by the German Conrad Zuse.
But other areas beside business and technology (advertising, entertainment, movies and television, pop music, teen slang, etc.) are also riddled with Denglisch and Neudeutsch. German-speakers listen to Rockmusik (die) on a CD (pronounced say-day) and watch movies on a DVD (day-fow-day).

“Apostrophitis” and the “Deppenapostroph”

The so-called “Deppenapostroph” (idiot’s apostrophe) is another sign of the decrease in German–language competence — and another thing blamed on English and/or Denglisch. German does normally use apostrophes (a Greek word) in some situations, but not in the way some misguided German–speakers do so today.

Adopting the Anglo–Saxon use of apostrophes in the possessive, some Germans now add it to German genitive forms where it should not appear. Today, walking down the street of any German town, one can see business signs announcing “Andrea’s Haar- und Nagelsalon” or “Karl’s Schnellimbiss.” The correct German possessive is “Andreas” or “Karls” – no apostrophe. An even worse violation of German spelling is using an apostrophe in s-plurals: “Auto’s,” “Handy’s,” or “Trikot’s.”

Although the use of the apostrophe for the possessive was common in the 1800s, it has not been used in modern German. But the 2006 edition of Duden’s “official” reformed spelling reference allows the use of the apostrophe (or not) with names in the possessive, provoking much vigorous discussion. Some observers have labeled the new outbreak of “Apostrophitis” the “McDonald’s effect,” alluding to the use of the possessive apostrophe in the McDonald’s brand name.

Translation Problems

Denglisch also presents special problems for translators. A translator of German legal documents into English struggled for the right words until she came up with “case Management” for the Denglisch phrase “technisches Handling”. German business publications often use English legal and commercial jargon for concepts like “due diligence,” “equity partner,” and “risk management.” Even some well-known German newspapers and online news sites (besides calling die Nachrichten the “news”) have been tripped up by Denglisch. The respected Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) incorrectly used the incomprehensible Denglisch term “Nonproliferationsvertrag” for a story on the nuclear non–proliferation treaty, which in good German has long been rendered as der Atomwaffensperrvertrag. German TV reporters based in Washington, D.C. often use the Denglisch term “Bush–Administration” for what is correctly called die Bush–Regierung in German news accounts. They are part of a disturbing trend in German news reporting that, in a German news Web search, pulls up over 100 results for “Bush–Administration” versus over 300 for the better–German “Bush–Regierung.”

Microsoft has been criticized for its use of anglicisms or Americanisms in its German–language publications and software support manuals. Many Germans blame the vast U.S. firm’s influence for computer terms such as “downloaden” and “uploaden” instead of normal German “laden” and “hochladen.” But no one can blame Microsoft for other forms of deformed Denglisch vocabulary that is an insult to both Deutsch and...
English. Two of the worst examples are “Bodybag” (for a shoulder backpack) and “Moonshine–Tarii” (discounted telephone night rate). Such lexical miscreations have drawn the wrath of the Verein Deutsche Sprache e.V. (VDS, the German Language Association), which created a special award for the guilty parties.

Each year since 1997 the VDS prize for Sprachpanscher des Jahres (“language diluter of the year”) has gone to a person the association considers that year’s worst offender. The very first award went to the German fashion designer Jil Sander, who is still notorious for mixing German and English in bizarre ways. The 2006 award went to Günther Oettinger, Ministerpräsident (governor) of the German state (Bundesland) of Baden-Württemberg. During a TV broadcast entitled “Wer rettet die deutsche Sprache” (“Who will save the German language?”) Oettinger declared: “Englisch wird die Arbeitssprache, Deutsch bleibt die Sprache der Familie und der Freizeit, die Sprache, in der man Privates liest.” (“English is becoming the work language. German remains the language of family and leisure time, the language in which you read private things.”) An irritated VDS issued a statement explaining why it had chosen Herr Oettinger for its award: “Damit degradiert er die deutsche Sprache zu einem reinen Feierabenddialekt.” (“He thus demotes the German language to a mere dialect for use when one is not at work.”) The runner-up was Jörg von Fürstenwerth, whose insurance association promoted the “Drug Scouts” to help get German youths off of drugs with slogans like “Don’t drug and drive.”

Gayle Tufts and Dinglish Comedy

Many Americans and other English-speaking expats end up living and working in Germany. They have to learn at least some German and adapt to a new culture. But few of them earn a living from Denglisch. American–born Gayle Tufts makes her living in Germany as a comedienne using her own brand of Dinglish — for which she coined the word “Dinglish” to differentiate it from Denglisch. In Germany since 1990, Tufts has become a well-known performer and book author who uses a blend of German and American English in her comedy act. However, she takes pride in the fact that although she is using two different languages, she does not mix the two grammars. Unlike Denglisch, Dinglish supposedly uses English with English grammar and German with German grammar, and avoids mixing them. A sample of her Dinglish: “I came here from New York in 1990 for two years, und 15 Jahre später bin ich immer noch hier.”

Not that she has made complete peace with German. One of the numbers she sings is “Konrad Duden must die,” a humorous musical attack on the German Noah Webster and a reflection of her frustration over trying to learn Deutsch. And her Dinglish isn’t always as pure as she claims. Her own Dinglish utterance about Dinglish: “It’s basically what most Americans speak for the zehn, fünfzehn Jahren that we wohn here in Deutschland. Dinglish is not a neue Phänomen, it’s uralt and most New Yorkers have been speaking it zeit Jahren.” As “Deutschlands ‘Very–First–Dinglish–Allround– Entertainerin’ ” Tufts lives in Berlin. In addition to her performing and TV appearances, she has published two books: Absolutely Underwegs: eine Amerikanerin in Berlin (Ullstein, 1998) and Miss Amerika (Gustav Kiepenheuer, 2006). She also has released several audio CDs.
“G.I. Deutsch” – Germlish
Much more rare than Denglisch is the reverse phenomenon sometimes called Germlish. This is the forming of hybrid “German” words by English-speakers. I have always called this “G.I. Deutsch,” because of the many Americans stationed in Germany who sometimes invented new words from German and English (Germlish). My favourite example has long been a word that always makes Germans laugh. The Germlish word Scheißkopf (sh’t head) does not really exist in German, but Germans who hear it can understand it. In German the Scheiß-prefix is used in the sense of “lousy,” as in Scheißwetter for “lousy weather.” The German word itself is much tamer than the English s-word, often closer to English “damn” than its literal translation.

Über–German
A variation of G.I. Deutsch is “über–German” in English. The tendency to use the German prefix über– (also spelled “über” without the umlaut) is seen in U.S. advertising, in much the same way as English in German ads (but much more limited in scope). The use of “über/über” is also used on English-language game sites. Like Nietzsche’s Übermensch (“super man”), the über– prefix is used to mean “super–,” “master–” or “best–” whatever, as in “übercool,” the “überphone,” or the “überdiva.” Note: It’s much cooler to use the umlauted form, as in German.

Below are some examples of German vocabulary that uses pseudo English words or words that have a very different meaning in German.

· die Aircondition (air conditioning); der Beamer (LCD projector); der Body (body suit); die Bodywear (underwear); der Boomer (mike person); der Callboy (gigolo); der Comic (comic strip); der Dressman (male model); der Evergreen (golden oldie, standard); der Gully (manhole, drain); das Handy (mobile phone); der Hotelboy (bellboy); jobben (to work); der McJob (low–pay job); das Mobbing (bullying, harrassment); der Moonshine–Tarif (discount night rate)²; der Oldtimer (vintage car); der Overall (overalls); der Talkmaster (talk show host); der Twen (twenty–something)

Ad English Denglisch
Below are examples of English phrases or slogans used in German advertisements by German and international companies.

· “Business flexibility” – T–Systems (T–Com); “Connecting people” – Nokia; “Science for a better life” – Bayer HealthCare; “Sense and simplicity” – Philips sonicare, “the sonic toothbrush”; “Relax. You’re dressed.” – Bugatti (suits); “Make the most of now.” – Vodafone; “Mehr (more) Performance” – Postbank; “There’s no better way to fly – Lufthansa; “Image is everything” – Toshiba TVs; “Interior Design für die Küche” (book) – SieMatic; “The spirit of commerce” – Metro Group; “O2 can do” – O2 DSL (pron “oh–two”); “You & Us” – UBS bank (also used in U.S.); “So where the bloody hell are you?” – Qantas (also

²) Used for a time by the German phone company Deutsche Telekom.
used in U.S.); “We speak image” – Canon printer; “There’s more to see” – Sharp Aquos TV; “Imagination at work” – GE; “Inspire the next” – Hitachi; “Explore the city limits” – Opel Antara (car)

References