

A New Language: “Trendy” Deutsch

A humorous interpretation of how German is becoming *americanized*

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Learning German is no easy matter for the foreigner. Not only are there many long words to learn, but there is also the rigid structure of the language. Based upon Latin, German has a lot of strict, no-nonsense rules concerning the grammar and construction of the sentence. But the greatest difficulty is the positioning of the verb: it requires an enormous intellectual effort to get used to putting the verb at the end of the sentence.

To make matters worse, the teaching of German language in schools abroad discriminates against normal, day-to-day German. Practical phrases are learnt, but not emphasized. Instead, teachers try to perpetuate 18th and 19th century “High” German, so that their students might someday be able to decipher German classics.

Yet, after having slaved through the horrors of German grammar and studied all the great classics, the foreign student of German will find out that the old German of Goethe and Schiller has long since ceased to exist and it is questionable whether there is a German language left at all. To put it bluntly, modern German is being attacked by its near cousins, the English and American languages, and being so successfully colonized (americanized if you will) that the language of the once proud Teutonic tribes sounds more and more like English. This is a phenomenon linguists call verbal imperialism. Do you find it hard to believe? Let me give some examples.

Place yourself in the shoes of a foreigner who walks down Königstrasse in Stuttgart for the first time. He or she will be confronted with a variety of so-called *Fremdwörter*, or *Neudeutsch* as Germans like to say. They are, for example, *super sportswear*, *last minute top Angebot*, *video shop*, *city card*, *T-shirt*, *bestseller*, *skin scent*, *seniorpass*. Any foreigner who has taken the time to study German beforehand, only to be confronted with all these English words, will ask the logical question: Have I been wasting my time learning a language that no longer exists?

But this “foreignization” of the language doesn’t stop at the shop windows. If you want to have a drink, you go to a *bar* (Theke) and order a *Long-Drink* (gestrecktes Getränk). If you wish to practise German in a bar, you might hear a yuppie-like German say: “Oh, Sie möchten einen *small talk* (Geschwätz) in Deutsch machen. Deutsch ist doch ganz *easy* (leicht) und wird kein *Stress* (Anstrengung). Deutsch ist *no Problem* (kein Problem).”

This verbal imperialism has entered the leisure world. Germans are fanatical about sports, and love to go to their *Fitnesscenters* (Körperertüchtigungszentrum). In order to keep their *bodies* (Körper) *fit* (gesund und munter), many Germans dress up in their *sweatshirts* (Schweißhemd) and go *jogging* (Dauerlauf) in the *city park* (Stadtpark). At the golf course, when a golfer makes a good shot, everybody says “*what a lovely shot*” (Was war ein guter

Schlag). By doing this, they become part of the *exclusive world of* (ausgewählte) *beautiful people* (Schönen und Reichen).

In the music world, the use of German in song lyrics has almost become forbidden. Turn on the radio and most of all the songs are in English. You would think you were in Los Angeles or London. And the announcers speak of the “*top zwanzig Hits aus den USA*”. The only singer of importance who sings in real, classical “High” German is by the name of Heino. Mention his name to young Germans and their faces will express horror and disgust. Ask why he is not accepted and Germans will tell you “sein Stil ist *out-of-date* (altmodisch) und er ist jetzt ein *nobody* (niemand)”.

German politicians are another group of people who throw lots of English words into their speeches. They talk about the *clevere* (kluge) Politiker, that another politician had a *blackout* (Bewußtlosigkeit), that German foreign policy didn't possess any good *timing* (Rhythmus) and the introduction of the DM into the former German Democratic Republic was a *disaster* (Katastrophe). And, in order to show their worldwide experience and cultural superiority, politicians will use that overused cliché “*last, but not least*” (schließlich), which to any English speaking foreigner evokes feelings of amusement and astonishment.

In the business world, German is no longer *up-to-date* (auf dem laufenden). And the ones who take a perverse delight in decimating the poor German language are your consultants, who think they are sophisticated (sophisticated because they can put so many English words into their presentation). Here is a typical speech of a financial consultant given to the top management.

“*Gentlemen*, ich möchte mit einem *Statement* beginnen. Diese *Company* hat *Troubles* und wenn es so weiter geht, hat sie no *Future*. Ich habe das *Cash Management* *gecheckt* und ich war *geschockt*. Das *Return on Investment*, oder besser gesagt, die *Profitability* in diesem Haus ist eine absolute *Horror Story*. Warum? Ihre *Manpower Costs* sind *Out of Control*. Und die *Department Bosses* machen ihren *Job* auf eine viel zu *relaxte* und *coole* Art. Ich habe das *Feeling*, daß deren *Motto* ‘*Easy living* ist ‘*irri* ist. Meine *Message* ist folgende: Sie, das *Management*, muß ein *Job-Killer Program* starten, um diese *Softies* zu *eliminieren* und dann “*Modern Business Methods*” *adoptieren*, nämlich *Time is money*.”

It is now clear with all these examples, the reader must objectively admit that the speed at which Germany is assimilating English words means that there is not going to be much left of this language in a few years time. English has been gaining so much the upper hand that the German language is becoming a dying species. Its tragic disintegration can be described as a slow, tortuous and inevitable process. With this in mind, one can only accept the foregone conclusion that German in 20 or 30 years will belong to the club of ancient languages, like Latin or Greek and will be taught only in the “altsprachliches Gymnasium”.

This brings me to my main point: The foreign student of German should simply forget about learning its vocabulary and grammatical rules because it will soon prove to be a complete waste of time. Instead, it is better now to encourage foreigners, who wish to live, work and communicate in Germany, to learn English. Yes, you have read me correctly. You will at first find this suggestion preposterous, but if you think about it, it is not such an absurd idea. Why force people to learn something that will be useless in a few years?

I know this article might leave you in a state of shock . To help you through this traumatic phase of change. just keep in mind the latest German motto: "Don't worry, be happy" (macht euch keine Sorgen, seid glücklich) and everything will turn out fine.



"Do I really
possess
exceptional
intelligence?"