Anglicism and Pseudo Anglicism in Germany

Anglicism, Pseudo-Anglicism, and Denglisch-las! Deutsch talken, dude! Just like in many other parts of the world, the Anglo-American impact on culture and daily life can also be witnessed in Germany.

Movies, games, and music are mostly of American origin, but not only are entertainment and media influenced by it but also the language. In Germany, this influence becomes obvious in many cases. Scientists of the University of Bamberg have found out that the use of Anglicisms in Germany has increased more and more over the last twenty years; talking about substantives, it has even doubled. Of course, this is not only the fault of Coca-Cola or The Warner Brothers but also an effect of the dominance of the English language as a way to communicate with the whole world.

That is why many English words have made it into everyday use in Germany and within the German language. They are not all the same; some are just lent, and others are completely made up. It’s time to take a closer look at Anglicism, pseudo-Anglicism, and “Denglisch”.

Let’s first face the difference between Anglicisms and Denglisch. The first one means just those words which were adopted from the English language, most of them meaning things, phenomena, or anything else without a German expression for it - or at least with no expression that is really used. Sometimes, this can be useful, but sometimes, it is just excessive. For example, there are plenty of German words, but people just want to sound interesting by using English ones instead. That would be called Denglisch.

Digital world

Examples for Anglicisms in German can easily be found in the world of computers and electronics. Whereas in the 1980s, mostly German words were commonly used to describe digital issues, today, most people use English equivalents. An example is the word Platine, meaning (circuit) board. Another one is the rather silly sounding expression Klammeraffe, a German word for the at sign. Besides the digital world, you could also mention “Rollbrett” for skateboard. By the way, nationalists or even national socialists in Germany often refuse to use English words, even if they are really common. Instead, they use German equivalents nobody would ever use like “Weltnerz” instead of Internet or even Weltnetz-Seite (“Website”). Not only does the digital world brings many new anglicisms to Germany, but also, business-related topics are more and more likely to be described in English than in German. Because of globalization, many companies think it makes them sound more international if they use English expressions instead of German ones.

It is rather common in many companies today to call the Boss the CEO - an expression that was widely unknown twenty years ago. Many use titles like that for the whole staff. By the way, staff is also an example of an English word replacing a traditional German one - Belegschaft.

English assimilation

While substantives are rather easy to integrate into the German language, it gets a bit more difficult and also confusing when it comes to verbs. With the German language having rather complex grammar compared to English, it becomes necessary to conjugate them in everyday use. That’s where it becomes weird. "Ich habe gechiillt" (I chilled) is just an everyday example of an Anglicism being used just like a German verb. Especially among young people, speech patterns like this can often be heard. The language of the youth leads us to another similar phenomenon: translating English words or phrases word by word into German, making a calque. Many German words have English origins nobody would notice at first sight. Wolkenkratzer is just the German equivalent of skyscraper (though meaning cloud-scraper). Not only single words but also whole phrases have been translated and adopted, and they sometimes even replace the correct expression that also exists in German. Saying "Das macht Sinn", meaning "That makes sense", is common, but it just doesn’t make sense at all.

The right expression would be "Das hat Sinn" or "Das ergibt Sinn". Nevertheless, the first one is silently replacing the others. However, sometimes, this phenomenon is even by intention. The verb "gesichtspalmieren", mainly used by young Germans, doesn’t really make sense to those who don’t know the meaning of "face palm" - it is just a word-for-word translation into German.

However, as a native English speaker, the German language gets confusing when it comes to pseudo-anglicisms. Many of them are in use, and they all have one thing in common: They sound English, but they were made up by Germans, mostly because somebody wanted something to sound more international. Good examples are "Handy", meaning cell phone, a “beamer”, meaning video projector, and "Oldtimer", meaning classic car. Sometimes, this can also lead to embarrassing misunderstandings, for example, if some German tells you he or she is working as a Streetworker, meaning he or she is dealing with homeless people or drug addicts and doesn’t know that it originally described a street prostitute. Sometimes, it can be useful to loan words from other languages, and sometimes it just sounds silly. German is a beautiful language that can describe almost everything precisely and doesn’t need to be replaced by another one - what do you think? Are anglicisms enriching or unnecessary?

by Michael Schmitz, 06 March 2017

Source: https://www.thoughtco.com/anglicism-in-germany-3987436 [2020-07-08]