

Leseprobe aus:

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Denglisch for Better Knowers



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# **Denglisch for Better Knowers**

*Fun Birds, Smart Shitters, Hand Shoes and  
more craziness with the amazing German language*

Ullstein

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## A note from the Authors

Dearest Reader,

If you're anything like us, you may have met people who while not knowing much about the German language, have the following prejudices about it:

1. »German is so harsh! *SCHMETTERLING!* Ha! Even the word for ›butterfly‹ sounds like two angry robots wrestling to their deaths!«
2. »Look how long its words are! *Streichholzschachtel!* That's hilarious!«
3. »Did you hear what Mark Twain said about The Awful German Language? He basically said it was invented by a lunatic with an affinity for never ending nouns and should be quietly retired as a world language ...«
4. »*Schadenfreude* is a pretty good word. English doesn't have a word for *Schadenfreude*. German Language: 1, English Language: 2487.«

If you're anything like us, you also know that's a load of nonsense. Most languages sound harsh to a foreign ear, or when just shouted angrily, which people making fun of German tend to do. There are reasons why the words are longer, which, once explained, reveal an awesome kind of language genius. Mark Twain is funny, but misses all the joys of the

language's apparent complexity. As for *Schadenfreude*, it is just the most popular gleaming prize on a huge shelf of German's lesser known trophies.

In short, we believe that the German language is badly in need of a re-brand to challenge these out-dated stereotypes. It's about time that someone did something nice for it, and we want to be that someone(s). The fact that it's not our native language is no disadvantage, since it makes it easier for us to find joy and awe in the simple things like an idiom the average German has said a thousand times, without ever thinking about the individual words that comprise it.

This book is a love letter to the German language. We hope you enjoy it.

*Liebe Grüße,*  
Adam and Paul.

P.S. We know *Denglisch* is a made up word with several different definitions depending on who uses it. Here it's taking an existing German word, phrase or idea (even if its true origin might be an even older culture or language), and translating it into English.

## Introduction

There was a time when English and German were like an inseparable young couple that acted, dressed and sounded alike. Indeed, it was difficult to tell where one ended and the other began.

Then, as time and bitterness aged them, ravaging their relationship, cracks in their union began to show. First, they began to sleep in separate beds, then separate rooms, then separate houses, then eventually were estranged to separate landmasses, forever to be divided by water, war and France, in denial of all the good times they once shared.

German turned in upon itself, to lick its wounds in isolation, broken only by the occasional visit from an affable Swiss or Austrian. English, meanwhile, went on the opposite journey. Making up for lost time, it gleefully discarded its inhibitions, flirted with exotic influences, and compromised the world over in an attempt to entertain the masses. It forgot its roots, abandoned its genders, and sucked in foreign vocabulary from all corners of the globe. Some might even say that the language of Shakespeare cheapened itself in its frivolous rush to please and popularise. In other words, it slept around.

Meanwhile, prickly and unforgiving, German trundled slowly forward, like a slow but sturdy horse-and-cart, being increasingly honked at by impatient English cars coming up behind it. It wouldn't be long, indeed, before German's sweet,

former lover had been cemented in place as the lingua franca, destined always to be the loudest voice in newly global conversations.

Today, German seems to be increasingly under attack from all sides, whether it be outsiders abandoning its study in their schools, in favour of trendier languages like Spanish, Esperanto, and Mandarin, or from within, from its youth, and the marketing departments of its companies, ever quicker to reach for the shiny, new Anglicism – having their thoughts *upgedatet*, *upgeloadet*, *gepostet* and *outgesourcet* into English, while perfectly good and equivalent German words are left shunned like beautiful, antique furniture that's swapped for trendy, flat-pack crap.

While the kind of people who own tambourines might argue that it doesn't matter which language we're all using just as long as we understand each other, we must also protect what is being lost. Wielded in the right, crafted hands, German is unparalleled in its ability to precisely articulate its speaker's thoughts. More importantly, like all languages, German is much, much more than just a collection of words. It's the toolkit which you can use to unpick and understand the mind and ideas of an entire culture – the one that once bore the title of Poets and Thinkers.

Germans are understandably attached with great reverence to their beautiful words, expressions and idioms – even having limited success in infiltrating other languages with some of them, such as *Kindergarten*, *Rucksack*, *Gesundheit* or *Zeitgeist* – but sadly, these words tend to sit alone in an occasional English sentence, lonely and afraid like lost children in a forest. The full, awe-worthy power of German remains largely impenetrable to all but the most patient and

forgiving *Ausländer* who is willing to put in the hundreds of hours of study. Many learners find that the German grammar trips them up so often and so cruelly that at some point, they just stay down, play dead, and retreat back to the soft, cuddly safety of English, embarrassed to utter much more than »*zwei Bier, bitte*« in their local *Kneipe*.

As English grows in its global and cultural influence, it seems the amount Germans will be forced to speak it will only increase. There is another option, however, which we call *Denglisch*. While it may initially appear as if we are just taking the clumsiest nouns and idioms of the German language and translating them literally into English for fun, it is much more than that. *Denglisch* is a chance to take the beautiful phrasings and ideas of the German people, and present them to the *Ausländer*, gift wrapped in the familiar words of his language, so that they may understand them. It is a chance to teach. It is a chance to give back.

With their defences lowered, the *Ausländer* will be left naked and exposed to the full primal power contained within the mind and imagination of German culture. They will learn. They will be impressed. They will respect and appreciate the beauty that the German language can offer. Even when they hear those *Denglisch* terms which don't translate all that well or even seem a bit silly in English, we will point out why there is still a valid reason for the *Ausländer* to adopt them into their kiddy toy language.

What follows is a personal collection of our favourite expressions, idioms, compound words and other linguistic possibilities offered by the German language, divided into the different areas of life where they are most likely to be relevant.



Now, you may be met with resistance. Some confusion. Perhaps even complete bafflement. But persist! The *Ausländer* may be initially unwilling to accept exactly why they shouldn't *ask after sunshine, eat cherries with you, or reach you the water*. However, even if Denglisch is not immediately *the yellow of their eggs*, or if they protest to *understand only train station*, you must be insistent that *you mean nothing for ungood*. Don't worry, this book will help on your noble quest.

## Denglisch in the Office

*Das Konzept ist zu fuzzy.*

*Wir müssen durch den clutter breaken!*

In 2006, the Governor of Baden-Württemberg, Günther Oettinger, declared that English will be the language of work, German will be that of family and free time, the language in which one reads at home (*»Englisch wird die Arbeitssprache, Deutsch bleibt die Sprache der Familie und der Freizeit, die Sprache, in der man Privates liest.«*)

His sentiments caused a small amount of controversy. While some people enjoyed the idea of speaking German only in the safety of their own homes, like a naughty little secret, many did not. By many, of course, we mean most of the country's eighty-two million people. So many so, in fact, that good old Günther was awarded the honourable title of »Language Abuser of the Year« (*»Sprachpanscher des Jahres«*) for his absurd statement.

While Mr Oettinger may have waved his little white flag at the first sign of a word being *outsourcet* to the English language, he may have had some small point. If there is one area that Anglicisms have been particularly penetrative, it is in the meeting rooms, PowerPoint presentations and bullshit bingo of the modern German office. As the internet continues to shrink the world like a jumper left too long in the wash, and more international German businesses trade in

English, it's ever more tempting to dip your hands into the cookie jar marked »foreign words«, even if they're only being used by Germans, talking to Germans, in German, in Germany. You may have observed such a curious phenomenon.

Then they take these words back home with them – right back into Günther's final bastion of pure German-speaking hope. One day, we'll be there, with our families, in our leisure time, reading our private things, and then all of a sudden we'll notice someone start talking about how »*Der Computer rebootet nicht. Ich wollte doch mit einem High Society Groupie flirten und chatten. Ich bekomme einfach kein Happy Ending.*« or »*Birthday Parties sind immer ein Highlight. Tolle Happenings mit Happy Hour. Da profitiere ich von all meinen social tools und features. Ich bin ein Ladykiller!*«

So what can you do? Well, you can push back! The English language has proved just how pervasive certain catchy (and meaningless) office phrases can be. You know, *pushing envelopes, reinventing wheels, singing from hymn sheets, getting ducks in a row, thinking outside boxes*. Bullshit bingo phrases like these are now used internationally, creeping into the offices of other countries and other languages, even though just about no one remembers where they came from, who said them first, or even what they mean. Well, if no one really knows the meaning or origins of their current office bullshit anyway, why not package up a few superior German office clichés for international Denglish delivery?

Through inter-company e-mails, morning scrum meetings, whispered cubicle gossip and idle chit-chat around the water cooler, the office is the classroom in which our international colleagues can be given their daily dose of Deng-

lisch. German language enthusiasts need only scatter the seeds of their language all across the world, and wait for them to bloom.

## **Hello together** (*Hallo zusammen*)

Anyone whose global company is armed with an office of affable, hard-working and fastidious Germans is likely to have received a mass e-mail from them that begins »*Hello together*« – the Denglisch for »Hallo zusammen« – used in the place of the English »Hi all«. In fact, in my first job here there was a woman who shouted it loudly each morning, as she walked past our open-plan office. Why is it superior to »Hi all«? The difference, while subtle, should be obvious. The English »Hi all« is about one greeting many. It separates. It says man is, in fact, an island. Meanwhile, »*Hello together*« is a superior group greeting. It gently reinforces to the foreigner the importance of solidarity. Union. Companionship. That their island is really rather more of a group of islands, an archipelago, if you will, and they shouldn't forget that, at least if they want to avoid an office-based mutiny.

## **Party Evening** (*Feierabend*)

Every culture likes a little partying after it finishes the main business of the day. Whether that means a few pints in the local pub after a day's work in the city, a fireside drum-banging after you've built a new mud-hut, or even an igloo-pop disco after you've stockpiled the year's supply of blubber. There are few cultures, however, that could trust their citizens enough to wish them a nice *Party Evening* at whatever time of day that they finish work, whether it is night, afternoon, or even controversially, morning. It's a concept ripe for misuse; only safe in the most sensible and trusted German

hands. Wish a Spanish paperboy »Nice Party Evening« after his morning round, and handfuls of confusing, uninvited fireworks might blast their way into the village's naptime. Wish a boisterous Brazilian binman »Nice Party Evening« before the morning rush-hour, and there will be a thousand car traffic jams, honking uselessly behind a colourful feather-covered parade. Wish the humble Russian baker »Nice Party Evening«, and he would be vodka-sodden and entirely flammable by lunch. Meanwhile, it is only the fastidious and reliable Germans that will be patient and respectful enough to celebrate modestly and quietly until the rest of normal society knocks off to join them in their revelry.

## Smart Shitter (*Klugscheißer*)

An arrogant person who hates work so much that they try to poop as much as they can on the time and cost of their employer.



## Chair Farter (*Sesselpupser*)

A person whose job consists of little more than pushing a pen around while making one chair less easy to steal

AN ARROGANT PERSON WHO LOVES WORK SO MUCH  
SO THAT THEY REFUSE TO POOP ON THE TIME  
AND COST OF THEIR EMPLOYER,  
PREFERRING INSTEAD TO INFLECT THE  
CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR REPRESSED BOWELS  
UPON THEIR SMART-SHITTING COLLEAGUES.





## Egg Swinging (*Eierschaukeln*)

The English language is severely lacking in poetic vocabulary to define idlers. It has *layabout*, which is bland, uninspired, and can be forgotten by the end of the sentence. *Layaround*, was it? *Be-about*, maybe? Who knows. The same cannot be said of German, which communicates its meaning perfectly, while also provoking a striking visual image that lingers in the mind of its audience. Like *chair farting*. Poetic and precise. A mental image that burns its meaning into your brain. As if the subject had not been defined enough, German even goes one step further, clarifying which kind of idler the idler is. As we've already established, a sitting down idler is obviously a *Chair Farter*. So clear, it's tangible. Male, female, doesn't matter: you can almost smell the meaning. But what happens when you take the chair away, leaving a male idler in an equally useless standing position, adding roughly as much value to the company as its coat rack? Well, he's an *Egg Swinger*, of course.

## Everything in the green range (*Alles im grünen Bereich*)

Life is complex and unwieldy. It's not always easy to know exactly what you're feeling, even during the process of actually feeling it. Especially when people enquire as to your feelings using unspecific measurements like, »ok?« »good?« or »in Ordnung?«. This is where the English language could benefit from *everything in the green range*. It allows you to think of your mood and life not as an abstract fuzzy thing,

but a concrete gauge. The sort Homer Simpson might neglect to check at a power plant. Now that you have this gauge, your relationship to your feelings can change. You're no longer binary, either happy or sad. You're a whole range in-between, ever in flux. Traffic jam on the way to work? That's another notch towards red then. The beautiful colleague from marketing smiles at you in the elevator? Bam! Just like that you're back to green. You go with them to the canteen for a coffee, which then makes you thirty minutes late for a meeting with your boss. Back around the gauge we go towards orange. Every time some specific things happen, good or bad, you can imagine your level of happiness moving around the gauge, from a tranquil green range to an angry, feet slamming, shirt ripping, head shaking, Incredible Hulk style red.



## **Give me a house number** *(Nennen Sie mal eine Hausnummer)*

In English office clichés, estimates are called *ballpark figures*. Being that none of us have ever actually played baseball, though, we know ballparks about as well as we know pre-17th century Chinese Dynasties. Thus, the phrase »give me a ballpark figure« really says to us »hey, there's no need to be too accurate in your estimate, please just speculate wildly.« In short, give useless imprecise information that will lead people to the right general area, and then promptly abandon them in it. Hopelessly lost to wolves or lions or vultures or whatever else one might find in the great ballpark of office nightmares. A house number, though. Now that's something you can work with. It stands in front of a fixed, immovable building. You can ring its bell. You can ask the neighbours. You can sit outside it in your car, watching its residents through eye holes you've cut into yesterday's newspaper. Bring supplies. Bring biscuits. Wait it out. The information will have to come home eventually, and when it does, you'll be ready.

# DENGLISCH VERBOTEN!

## Colleagues,

A reminder — we speak a fully developed language which is not lacking in words.

Anyone caught using the following verbal molestations; please put €1 in the Anglicism jar. I've helpfully included the correct German word, in case you've forgotten it:

Downloaden	<i>Herunterladen</i>
Outsourcen	<i>Ausgliedern</i>
Upgraden	<i>Aufrüsten</i>
Forwarden	<i>Weiterleiten</i>
Enforcen	<i>Durchsetzen</i>
Follow-Uppen	<i>Nachverfolgen</i>
Highlighten	<i>Hervorheben</i>
Overengineeren	<i>Verkomplizieren</i>
Twittern/Facebooken	<i>Zeit verbraten</i>
Brainstormen	<i>Zeit verbraten</i>

Thanks,  
**THE MANAGEMENT**





## **My Dear Mister Singing Club's School of Denglisch: Umlaut envy**

In these School of Denglisch essays, we discuss a particular part of the German language that thrills us, and discuss in a little more length why it should thrill you too.

As previously discussed, English is the slutty village bicycle of languages. Everyone's had a ride, parked it, then applied the *bicycle erection*. While it is often suggested that because of its greedy range of influences, English has a more diverse and expansive vocabulary than any other language, it also means it has a more diverse and expansive range of those languages' collective nonsense.

Take spelling, for example. While other languages with the Roman alphabet used umlauts and accents to bend the 26 little symbols to their correct pronunciation, standardising into a consistent phonetic system, English looked at its French, Latin, Germanic and Scandinavian hodgepodge of mismatched sounds and spellings, and merely surrendered to the madness.

If languages were people, English would be an irrational lunatic, arbitrarily teasing and torturing its poor dyslexics, naked, on a roof, and screaming at the wind, »YOU SPELLED ›PHOENIX‹ WRONG, IDIOT!!«

By comparison, German is a speller's dream. An almost perfectly consistent system of letters and matching sounds.

Like a caring bystander at the bottom of the building, it looks up at the naked English maniac, and gently suggests, »Phö-nix?«

If this all sounds rather hyperbolic, and you can't imagine that the English language could ever suffer umlaut envy, then you're sadly mistaken. We're not above waiting until you're all not looking and stealthily pilfering from your umlaut aisle, using our ill-gotten gains with a casual disregard for accuracy and applicability. Take the now defunct English kitchen company Möben. They fought the Advertising Standards Agency for some five years for the right to use their umlaut, after a complaint was made by a customer that it wrongly implied they were German, when actually they were based on a trading estate in Manchester.

Möben's reasoning? Everyone knows German engineering is good (those long in memory may note a certain irony here, since originally in the 19th century the British added »Made in Germany« to German products to warn of their low quality). From those Huf Haus modular kits to the little wooden toys Germans staunchly believe are educationally superior. Möben wanted people to take them seriously. To achieve this, they needed an umlaut. So, Moben became Möben. It would be like if we, to support our careers as observers of German culture, changed our names to Pāul Hāwkins and Ādām Fletscher.

It's not just in the world of furniture, there's also something known as »the metal umlaut«. Mötley Crüe are probably the most famous example of it, with Motörhead a close second. I like to imagine their renegade umlauting comes back to haunt them when on tour here in Germany, and everyone keeps introducing them as »Moetley Cruue«. It's Motley,

guys. M-O-T-L-E-Y. »The umlauts are just for show, it's not a real umlaut«, they'd plead. The audience would stare back, mouths aghast. »What do you mean, *it's not a real umlaut? It's just for show?* Umlauts are serious business, heavily-tattooed foreigner! They're not like a funny novelty moustache you can just stick to the upper lip of your O.«

Clearly, what is needed in the English language is some small revolution of good sense, to stop generation after generation perpetuating the dogmatic nonsense spelling of their parents. How many more generations will put their ›phoenix‹ layer upon ›phoenix‹ layer, until someone brave enough eventually pulls the whole structure down, and builds a new one in its place labelled *Phōnix*?

English won't change itself. Evolution doesn't mean that everything gets better and better and better. It just means stubborn things survive. Indeed, an evolved thing is merely the sum of the maximum possible number of mistakes that could be made while still perpetuating it. Humans have stupid little toes and an appendix that sometimes explodes for no reason. English has its spelling.

English must be changed, then. We must look to better, foreign examples like German to learn from. Take, for example, the perfectly ordinary English sentence: *the bear's heir with the rare hair can make a prayer, eh?*

Gibberish. The vowels in each word are pronounced in the exact same way, but the spellings vary absurdly. It's a sentence that is cruelly booby trapped to trip up children, foreign language learners, and anyone else who is nonconformist and sensible (also known as dyslexics.)

However, with some minor tweaks and the addition of a simple little umlaut, we could harmonise the spelling of all

the words and everyone would know how to pronounce them. The sentence from above would become *the bār's hār with the rār hār can make a prār, ä?*

See, now that makes perfect sense. Since the next generation won't read anything written on dead trees anyway, because it will all be digital, now would be a perfect time to start fixing the English language. »Books« will soon just be distant memories. As I write this, there is a whole bunch of hoo-ha around the revelations of the American PRISM program and general governmental spying. I can't help but think, since they're in there anyway, reading all the words we're writing, they could do a little good. That, like a particularly pernickety teacher, they could get their global red pens out and fix it all up a bit. Maybe crawl the entire backlog of humanity's digitised history with some top secret CIA software, and do one big global »find and replace«, ushering in a new golden era of umlaut led, German inspired, English phoneticism.