

12-1-2007

Language Change in Business German

Norbert Hedderich
University of Rhode Island

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl>

Recommended Citation

Hedderich, Norbert (2007) "Language Change in Business German," *Global Business Languages*: Vol. 8 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol8/iss1/5>

Copyright © 2007 by Purdue Research Foundation. Global Business Languages is produced by Purdue CIBER. <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl>

This is an Open Access journal. This means that it uses a funding model that does not charge readers or their institutions for access. Readers may freely read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of articles. This journal is covered under the [CC BY-NC-ND license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Norbert Hedderich
University of Rhode Island

LANGUAGE CHANGE IN BUSINESS GERMAN

This article reports on a project in which recent language changes in Business German were analyzed as reflected in the weekly magazine *Wirtschaftswoche*. The focus of the analysis was the increasing number of lexical transfers from English into German. The wide spectrum of assimilation of these transfers into German is discussed as well as language changes not influenced by English. The article concludes with a summary of the debate on internationalisms in German with emphasis on business German.

BACKGROUND

All languages change over time, for a number of reasons. A new invention or concept may suddenly influence the lives of a language community, in which case it needs a recognizable linguistic label. Prior to 1980, the word *entsorgen*, “to dispose of in an environmentally safe manner” was virtually unknown in Germany. Today, the term is ubiquitous.

Since languages do not exist in a vacuum, a major impetus for language change is brought about by contact with other cultures. Words “loaned” from another language may be common place. Some of these “loans” implant themselves in their original form, others are adapted into the sound and structural system of the language, while others disappear. In the course of time German has been influenced by many languages, most strongly by Latin and French. Since 1945 the Anglo-American linguistic influence has been particularly strong. It has grown exponentially since the advent of the Internet in the early 1990’s.

Whereas everyday, colloquial German shows some prominent anglicisms such as *die Kids* and *relaxen*, the English influence is particularly strong in the language of special groups, such as *Jugendsprache* and in some sectors of the economy, including technology, the stock market and the entertainment industry. Many of these lexical transfers are a direct result of the fact that a significant number of technical and business de-

velopments come from English-speaking countries (Drews 1999). The recent wave of “internationalisms” or “anglicisms” in German has given rise to a heated debate about language in Germany. While some argue the proliferation of internationalisms is a sign of linguistic, even moral decay (*Sprachverfall, Sprachkritik*), others consider it a natural by-product of increased international contact.

The vast majority of the influence of English in the German language takes the form of lexical transfers. Grammatical change, such as a reduction of the German sentence bracket (e.g. *weil er hat kein Geld*) is still comparatively rare, and so is semantic change. For example the verb *lieben*, formerly used only for strong emotional attachments, is now possible in the full range of English “to love” and “to like” e.g. *Ich liebe Schwimmen* (Barbour 1990).

We find the influence of English vocabulary along a spectrum of assimilation in German vocabulary, ranging from direct to indirect borrowing. Bartsch and Siegrist (2001) provide a model of a five-segment spectrum of assimilation as follows:

1) Adoption (e.g. *Download*)

Adoptions are the most direct form of transfer. The spelling of the English word is kept in its original form. The word may be pronounced either as in British or American English or it may be assimilated to the German phonological system

2) Adaptation (e.g. *Dekoder, downloaden*)

The word has been adapted to the morphological and syntactical system of German

3) Mixed Compounds (e.g. *Softwareschmiede*)

German and English elements are combined to form a new compound noun.

4) Loan Translations (e.g. *Festplatte, Suchmaschine*)

Formation of a new word occurs on the basis of German elements, but according to the semantic pattern of English.

5) Pseudo-Transfers (e.g. *Handy*)

A new word is formed from English lexical and morphological elements. While sounding English, the word does not exist in English at all, or with a different meaning.

These types of anglicisms occur along a continuum. Ambiguities remain and some words are borderline items, with the result that one could argue for placement in a different category.

SOURCE MATERIAL FROM *WIRTSCHAFTSWOCHE*

The German business weekly *Wirtschaftswoche* was used as a source for this project. Published by Verlagsgruppe Handelsblatt GmbH, *Wirtschaftswoche* is a major German business publication with a weekly circulation of 194,000 in 2002. Its non-European correspondents report from New York, Beijing, Sao Paulo, the Silicon Valley, Singapore, Tokyo and Washington. The magazine features sections on Corporations, Technology, Management, Success, Lifestyle and Money. Each week, *Wirtschaftswoche* provides the previous week's "best" article from the U.S. business publication *Barron's* in German translation. Also, in 2002, the magazine began offering a weekly column in English. "McCabe's Week" is written by a British language and culture consultant and covers idiomatic use of (British) English.

The text portion of three successive issues, numbers 41-43 of October 2002, were systematically analyzed in order to gauge changes in business German. The study did not deal with the advertising portion of the magazine, since the language of German advertising has been dealt with in Language for Specific Purposes research before. Also, it can be considered a different text-type. In fact, advertising prominently features slogans and product names, and shows a significantly higher frequency of borrowings from English than journalistic prose.

In addition to the five types of anglicisms listed above, the study also took note of the following three categories: (1) the language of company names, product names and professional titles, (2) influences from languages other than English and (3) new formations from German word elements, without any international influence.

RESULTS

A total of 396 anglicisms were identified. The breakdown along the continuum of assimilation was as follows: almost half of the identified items, 176, fell into the category of “adoptions.” A few of the “old” and well-established transfers were well represented. A short list of these items follows, with the year of first documented use in the German press according to Carstensen’s *Anglizismen Wörterbuch* (Carstensen 2001): *Boom* (1954), *Comeback* (1947), *Job* (1949), *Know-how* (1952), *Lifestyle* (1977), *Manager* (1949), *Service* (1952), *Team* (1929).

However, the great majority of items in the adoption category were newer lexical transfers and not listed in the most recent edition of Carstensen’s highly detailed three-volume dictionary, which contains documented transfers only up to 1989. Common adoptions occurred in the following areas:

Technology, including Information Technology:

E-Commerce, Software, Dotcom, Chipbroker, DVD Boom, Soundsystem, Surround-Sound, Home-Cinema, E-Learning, Notebooks, eine Hosting-Division mit riesigem Serverpark, das Internet-Online-Banking-Portal.

Financial Services/Stock Market

Put-Option, Windfall Profits, Analysten, Onlinebroker, Performance, Highflyer, der Pennystock, Investor, Cash-Flow, der große Crash, die Topholdings von..., Value Investment, Cash-Flow je Aktie, Outperformer, Underperformer, Blue Chips, diese derivativen Produkte, Insider, Buyout, Shareholdervalue, die Homepages, Trader.

Management/Sales

Benchmarking, “turn-around”, der Output der Fabriken, das Meeting, auf der Agenda stehen, Business-to-Business-Plattform, Showroom, Outsourcing, Provider, “Cold Calls,” Coaching, Controlling, guter Kommunikator und Teamplayer, Global Player, Corporate Design.

Other:

Vans, im Falle eines Deals, überquellende Airports, der Berliner Thinktank der Bundesregierung, New Economy auf Talfahrt, Publicity, Joint Venture, High-End-Society, sich Know-how aneignen, Supply Chain Management, der Masterplan für den Innenhafen, ich suche immer den Input von anderen Menschen, die originellsten Gimmicks, Young Professionals, unsere Reputation, PR Gag, während des Brainstormings.

Slightly less than a quarter (88) of the lexical items found in the three issues of *Wirtschaftswoche* fell into the category “adaptations”, the second type of anglicism on the assimilation spectrum. In this group, words have been adapted in some way to the spelling and morphological system of German. Changes in pronunciation from the English original could not be considered in this study. They are much harder to document and in many cases English and “Germanized” forms exist side-by-side. As in the first group, nouns and adjectives dominate the field:

den Fokus legen auf, Refinanzierung, Internetkonzept, von den gelisteten Firmen, Publizist, Marktkapitalisierung, die Marketiers, fokussiert, profitabel, trashiges Design, Kernkompetenzen, Coachingtechniken, Konsortialprogramme, Businesspläne, Discountpreis, Cashgenerierung, wie paralysiert starren sie., in trendorientierten Business-Zirkeln, als Domäne hipper Werbeagenturen, mit gedimmtem Licht

The following verbs were found:

sie ticken wie die beiden..., wir checken, waren geschockt, ist auseinander gedriftet, die Gruppe chartert einen Business-Jet, outeten sich in einer Umfrage als Jobmuffel.

Group three, the mixed compounds consisting of English and German elements, is highly interesting. Slightly more than one quarter (107 items) fell into this group. The German penchant for compound nouns is well known and the influx of anglicisms seems to provide a wealth of source material for these new lexical creations.

The most “productive” English elements were “top” (*Topbegegnungen, Topunternehmen, Toptalent, Topfabriken, Topjob, Topleister*), “marketing” (*Marketingfeldzug, Marketingagentur, Messemarketing*,

Marketing-Kampagne, Marketingstrategie) and “management” (*Kundenmanagement, Managementthemen, Managementfähigkeiten, Managementzentrum*). Others include “boom” (*Boomjahr, Börsenboom, Konsumboom*), “online” (*Onlinetauscbörse, Onlinekonto*) “rally” (*Kursrally, Erholungsrally*), “business” (*Businessmode, Business-Anwender*), and “software” (*Software-Schmiede, Softwarehaus, softwaregesteuert*)

Other notable mixed compounds include:

Imageschaden, Spitzenbanker, Chiphersteller, die Ratingagentur Moody's, E-Commerce Lösungen, Internetjobbörse, Mitarbeiterportale, Bildungscontrolling (standardizing the evaluation of seminars), Vermögensverwalter-Rankings, echtes Kinofeeling, Kurs-Cash-Flow-Verhältnis, turn-around Fall, Fastfoodkette, der Chipriese Intel, die telefonische Bestellhotline (sic), Internetseite, Goodwill-Abschreibungen, die Fangemeinde, Researchunternehmen.

Loan translations were the fourth type of anglicisms analyzed. They are a form of indirect borrowings for which a new word is created with strictly German elements, but using the semantic pattern of English. Only a few such items were found:

Denkfabrik, Immobilienblase, Endverhandlungen, Geschäftsklima, Gewinnwarnungen, feindliches Übernahmeangebot, Gesetzesmacher, Suchmaschine.

Cases of pseudo-transfers, the fifth and final category, were also quite rare. Aside from the infamous *Handy, Wirtschaftswoche* mentioned *Mini-jobs, die Spots* (TV commercials), *junge urbane Twens* and *ein No-event*.

In addition to the five categories of anglicisms discussed above, changes were observed in three areas. First, many company names, product names, events, professional titles (Schanke 2001) and buildings/installations were in English, even if there was no immediate international connection or reference. There is the private railroad company *Connex*, the “headhunter” *HR Gardens und Access in Köln, ein kleines Unternehmen wie Smart Fuel Cell (SFC) aus Brunthal-Nord am Münchner Stadtrand* and a major competitor of Deutsche Telekom is *Talkline*. A planned magnetic railroad is called *Metrorapid* and the German

Railroad uses its *CargoMover*. Hamburg has its *Hafencity* and in Duisburg the container terminal is called the *Logport*. A competition for graduate students in business administration is *der Hochschulwettbewerb The Contest*. A fair for human resources consulting firms is *die Characters Personalmesse in München*. Finally, English titles occurred frequently in *Wirtschaftswoche*, such as *Marketingexecutive* and *Recruiting Director*.

Secondly, the influence of languages other than English was very limited. Seven words of French origin were identified (*Engagement, Fonds, rangieren, Usancen, Dependence, rasonieren* and *Branche*) with *Branche* forming a variety of compounds. There was one word of Russian origin, *Ukas* (Engl. “decree”).

Finally, there were some German neologisms which appear unrelated to outside influences. Most striking was the masculine agent ending “-er” to denote a company or organization. This could be influenced, however, by English words such as “provider.” Whereas a travel-tour operator used to be *das Reiseunternehmen*, he is now referred to as *der Reiseanbieter*. Other examples include: *Personaler, Parkhausbetreiber, Netzanbieter, der Computerbauer Apple, Inhalteanbieter, der Tester, der Nobelitaliener, der Kabelnetzbetreiber, die Drogerietochter* (drugstore subsidiary). Other new German word formations include *Promi-Koch, Geldhaus*, and *Kreativfabrik*.

CONCLUSION

A quantitative analysis was beyond the scope of this article. However, two linguists, Sabine Bartsch and Leslie Siegrist (2002) have recently tackled the question, using computer analysis of the enormous *Darmstädter Corpus Deutscher Fachsprachen*, which contains an enormous 2.8 million “running words.” Their study considered “adoption” and “adaptations,” which in this analysis of *Wirtschaftswoche* made up two thirds of the found items. With this approach, the authors found that anglicisms are rare compared to the overall number of items in a particular language for specific purposes (*Fachsprache*). In the category “business language” the percentage of anglicisms was 3.33% of the overall number of business language items.

In the *Wirtschaftswoche* texts, different subjects showed different concentrations of anglicisms. Articles on information technology and the stock markets tended to show greater English influence. Most pages of the magazine had at least one or two anglicisms, and their frequency may

also be a matter of journalistic preference. *Wirtschaftswoche* issue number 41, for instance, featured a two-page article on research on Alzheimer's Disease in the U.S. and contained no English influence at all.

There are several reasons why lexical transfers from English are used. Sometimes the anglicism fills an existing linguistic gap in German. A suitable German term may not exist and the lexical import expresses unambiguously what needs to be said. In order to find the proper nuance of a thing or concept, the English term simply might get the message across more clearly. The artistic connotation of English "design" is an example. The German words *Entwurf*, *Skizze*, and *Modell* do not quite convey the right meaning and so we find the common anglicism *Design*.

Other times an English word is transferred, even though a fitting German equivalent already exists. In some of these cases, two terms may compete for the public's attention, as with *Computer* vs. *Rechner*. Quite often, a major motive for use of anglicisms is stylistic variation, when repetition is to be avoided and synonyms are in demand. This occurs in the example: *Fluglinien: Airlines müssen. . .*

In order to find out reasons for English lexical transfer, Hoberg (2000) analyzed the statements of 330 Germans who were critical of the recent influx of anglicisms. He found they made the following four arguments: (1) Anglicisms are superfluous. Some provide enrichment, but one should reject the superfluous ones. (2) People who do not have the necessary English proficiency may be left out of communication. (3) Anglicisms are a way of "showing off"; and (4) Germans have a problem with national identity, as evidenced by their willingness to "give up" their language.

One of the more interesting developments of recent years has been the *Verein Deutsche Sprache e.V.* (VDS). Founded in 1997, it rapidly has become the most outspoken German organization advocating a containment of anglicisms. Initiated with purist intent, it now rejects the label "purist," and strives to provide suitable German equivalents to anglicisms. VDS addresses both governmental and private organizations, and attempts to make political as well as business leaders aware of their function as linguistic role models. On its website (<www.vds-ev.de>) VDS has posted an updated dictionary of anglicisms with suggested German equivalents. The 2003 edition of the dictionary, which is also available in hard copy, contains 5,085 words. These are grouped by category, *Wirtschaft* (W)/business being one of nine categories. In addition, VDS has assigned one of three "status" indicators to each anglicism. Items classi-

fied as being in Status Group 1 are considered *bewährt* (proven). They have become firmly implanted and accepted in German, containing such words as *Baby* and *Clown*. Status Group 2, *differenzierend* (differentiating) is defined as “German equivalent not accepted yet,” with such words as *E-Mail*. Status Group 3, *verdrängend* (encroaching upon German) are anglicisms considered superfluous, because a German lexical item with the exact same meaning exists, in the opinion of VDS.

Overall, the dictionary rates only 1% of its anglicism as “proven,” 16% are in the borderline group and the vast majority (80%) are considered “superfluous.” The remaining one percent is proper names and abbreviations. Business-related anglicisms make about one fifth of this dictionary (1,188 items) of which VDS ranked 988 “superfluous.”

REFERENCES

- Barbour, S. and Stevenson, P. (1990). *Variation in German: A Critical Approach to German Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- Bartsch, S. & Siegrist, L. (2002). Anglizismen in Fachsprachen des Deutschen. *Muttersprache*, 112(4), 309-323.
- Carstensen, B. and Busse, U. (2001). *Anglizismen-Wörterbuch: Der Einfluss des Englischen auf den deutschen Wortschatz nach 1945*. 3 Volumes. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter
- Drews, J. (1999) Auf dem Weg zum Denglisch. Wieviel Angloamerikanisch verträgt die deutsche Sprache? In: C. Meier (Ed.) *Sprache in Not? Zur Lage des heutigen Deutsch*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Hoberg, R. (2000). Sprechen wir bald alle Denglisch oder Germeng? In: K.M. Eichhoff-Cyrus and R. Hoberg (Eds), *Die Deutsche Sprache zur Jahrtausendwende: Sprachkultur oder Sprachverfall* (303-316). Mannheim: Dudenverlag.
- Schanke, E. (2001) Neuere englische Lehnwörter in der deutschen Wirtschaftsfachsprache aus der Sicht eines Norwegers. *Muttersprache*, 111(3), 235-247.