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Speaking Denglish: Exploring the Impact of Denglish and Anglicisms in German Culture and Identity

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Speaking Denglish:

Exploring the Impact of Denglish and Anglicisms in German Culture and Identity

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By

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Abstract

Many people consider English to be the lingua franca of the world. English may ease business deals and increase global communication, and yet, there are a number of people who have mixed feelings about the influences of English on their native languages and cultural identities. Germany is an example of this discontent due to the mixed views concerning the increased use of English, commonly known as Denglish, in various situation, which can create conflicts not only for individuals but also among specific social groups . Through my work, I examine some of the reasons for the increased use of Denglish and Anglicisms present in German and their demonstrated uses within German advertising, technology, and media and how this development affects cultural identities.

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Introduction

The goal of this project is to explore the increased use of English words in the German language and society and the effects of these words on national and cultural identity. As a native English speaker, my view on the Anglicization of languages is very different than the views of Germans. There are numerous articles written by native German speakers concerning the increased use of Denglish. The majority of articles written in English simply translate the views of the Germans. In order to understand why there has been an increase in English words used in German, I plan to explore the pros and cons of using Denglish or Anglicisms for both native German and native English speakers and how language represents culture and knowledge of a group.

Denglish can be categorized as follows: first the impact of English words on German grammar; second, the excessive use of English words, phrases, and/or slogans; third, the influence of English spelling and punctuation; forth, the coining of faux English words not existing in English or with an altered meaning in German (Oebel 143). In contrast, the Duden Dictionary Online defines Anglicism as "[the] transfer of a characteristic of English to a non-English language"[1].

Although Anglicism is a general term compared to Denglish, due to the numerous definitions of Denglish it is often hard to clearly differentiate the two terms since it is hard to strictly apply these definitions to real-world examples[2]. For the purpose of this paper, I am therefore going use the terms "Denglish" and "Anglicisms" interchangeably. My starting point will be a brief overview of the evolution of languages, focusing on English and German, which is the basis of understanding loanword integration followed by an exploration of the connection between language,

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[1] Translation mine
[2] "Denglich" is also used in a pejorative way

culture, and identity. I will then examine some of the common views of Denglish, from both the German and English points of view, which allows for understanding the current opinions that I will address below. Before moving onto the different ways businesses and advertising use English in Germany, I will investigate the multiple ways in which Germans integrate English into writing. All of these topics will give a better idea about how and why Denglish has become prevalent in Germany and the effect is has on Germans identity.

History of German and English

The history of Anglicisms is also vital in understanding modern day views on the increased usage of English words. Modern day English is an amalgamation of a number of old European languages. Due to the numerous invasions and different linguistic influences, English contains a large amount of grammatical and spelling complexities (Boeree). The natural phenomena of adopting words from other languages can be observed in all periods of history since "[l]anguage contact is often connected to borrowing", (*Nationalisms across the Globe* 119). Each language that was folded into English added in bits and pieces, which is part of why English is a relatively easy language to learn. Figure 1 illustrates some of the languages that were incorporated into English.
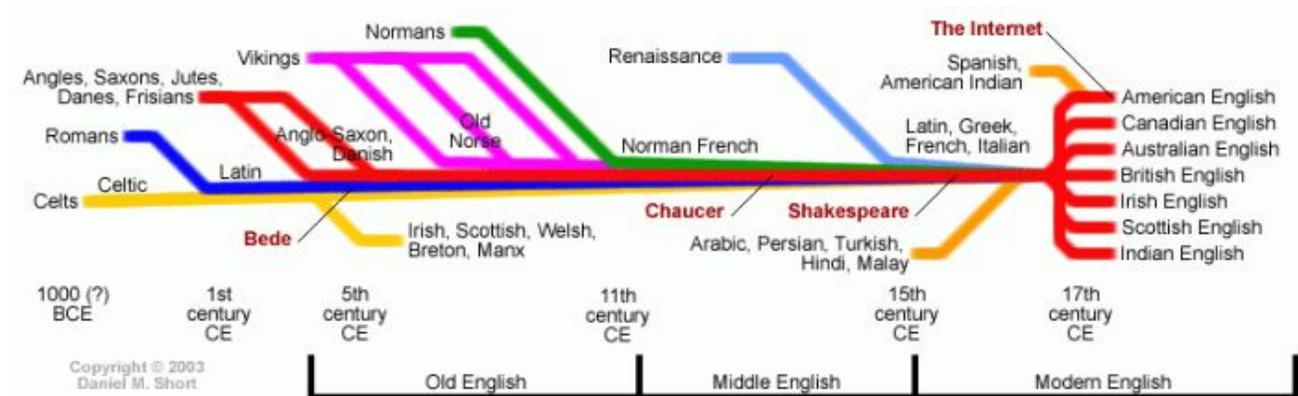
Figure 1: Development of English (Daniel M. Short)

In comparison, German began with West Germanic tribes who lived in Central Europe in the 8th century (Stickel 119-120). German and Latin were the primary languages, with Latin dominating literature, education, medicine, and religion until the 11th century when German borrowed French words for warfare, chivalry, and luxury goods because of the influence of French and Provençal love poetry (120). With the invention of the printing press aiding the spread of the Protestant Reformation, written German was standardized. The efforts of scholars and burghers encouraged the development and standardization of German, though Latin remained the language of the educated while French remained the language for the German aristocratic courts, the language of culture (Alder, "A Brief History of the German Language"). With the industrial revolution all European languages expanded because new technologies developed and contacts with other countries and languages increased (Stickel 124).

The similarities between English and German in terms of the letters of the alphabet, phonology, grammar, and vocabulary, makes incorporation of English words into German and vice-versa much easier. The histories of these two languages demonstrates that loanwords, cognates, and language evolution in general are not new. It is clear from Figure 1 that English had a number

of loanwords and influences from other languages. The influence of English on German is recorded as far back as the 16th and 17th centuries (Boeree, "The Evolution of English."). This indicates that the phenomenon of Denglish is not new. What is new is the term used to describe the use of English words in German.

Language, Culture, and Identity

Linguistic changes often go hand in hand with cultural developments and identity shifts. The term "culture" encompasses a local way of life and the worldviews of a group of people, which are often expressed by and through language. "...Culture is knowledge... [which] includ[es] the traditions and history of the group, its common sense, beliefs, values, attitudes and language." (Riley 36). German culture educationalist P. Doyé elaborates further on the connection between culture and language:

> The very nature of language forbids the separation of language from culture. If language is considered a system of signs, and signs are characterized by the fact that they are units of form and meaning, it is impossible to learn a language by simply acquiring the forms without their content.
>
> - Doyé 105

Language and culture therefore cannot be separated. Language is also an essential characteristic of a nation. It fosters relationships between citizens, affects development of national literature and art, and finally it is a way to express thoughts and ideals (Ivanoff 16). Moreover, language is not only an important factor of national identity but also in the development of personal and national identity.

Although categories such as race and gender are related to identity, they do not make it up entirely. Identity is fluid and is constantly changing, even within a cultural group. Everytime we speak, we are changing. Our sense of self in relation to the conversation partner(s) and the rest of the world shifts depending on where we are, our gender, social class, and they cause an internal and external identity shift (*Lodz Studies in Language : Identity through a Language Lens* 9). Languages, too, change and affect identity, and personal and national identity are shifting because of outside influences such as an increased absorption of Anglicisms in the German language.

The changing of German identity can be contributed to a number of factors in order to heighten their identity, some Germans, for example, now adopt Anglicisms in order to become distinct and to stand out (*Nationalisms across the Globe* 139). This will be explored in more depth later in the paper in the section titled "English Prone Groups".

One of the reasons why Germans are adopting English vocabulary is because of the widespread use of English and the increased frequency with which it is taught in German schools.

Views of Denglish

In order to understand how Denglish is used and misused, one must first understand some of the reasons for English becoming so prominent in the world, and the impacts it can have on those affected by this development.

With the increased globalization of the world, many languages are becoming endangered ("Language and Linguistics: Endangered Language"). Business and communication become more accessible as English becomes widely used at the expense of local languages and culture. The increased usage of English can undermine the unique local and cultural knowledge of an area and

leads to knowledge being lost or misunderstood for following generations ("Language and Linguistics: Endangered Language"). Anthony C. Woodbury's article in the *Linguistic Society of America* supports the idea that language is the backbone of society, "Much of the cultural, spiritual, and intellectual life of a people is experienced through language".

In order to help retain their identity and culture, Germans could, of course, similar to the French, create their own words for English terms in order to reduce the use of Anglicisms. Germans use Anglicisms in order to sound more cosmopolitan and modern, as well as to help distance themselves from the stigma of nationalism that is a result of World War II. However, these new words would need to be legitimized and conventionalized in order to be useful for all German speakers. Germany does have the *Rat für deutsche Rechtschreibung*, also known as the *Council for German Orthography*, which is in charge of deciding the rules for spelling and grammar in the 40 states and regions that make up the German Sprachraum ("Über den Rat*"*). This council does not have authority over the creation and implementation of new words. There is also the *Institut für Deutsche Sprache* which is the largest research center for the German language and it has produced dictionaries, monographs, handbooks, and other items on aspects of German (Stickel). A major authority on German words is the *Duden Dictionary*. Of course, there are numerous other German Language dictionaries that are currently published and in-use. The *Duden* is constantly adding and removing words from its dictionaries, but it cannot force German speakers to use the words it adds. Duden dictionaries are not limited to only German words; there was a large outcry over the newest edition in 2013 due to the addition of Anglicisms. No German words were created by Duden to replace these Anglicisms. Instead the words were accepted and integrated into the new edition. It is impossible to avoid Anglicisms in German society today, but embracing English could be a way for

Germans to demonstrate that they are open-minded and multicultural to get away from stereotypical nationalistic identity, showing instead that they are well-read and willing to act as global citizens (Connelly). Anglicisms can also enrich German through the provision of words, phrases and concepts that are not otherwise available in German and thus offer more venues for creating one's identity.

As a native English speaker who has studied German for over 5 years, I find Anglicisms to be helpful at times while learning and speaking German. Anglicisms mean that there is one less foreign word to memorize. One of the biggest challenges involves ensuring the use of the proper article and proper pronunciation. Certain Denglish words are now widespread and commonly used. These words, although they are originally English, have since gained a different meaning when used in German. This means that when native English speakers learn German, they must recall which words are actual Anglicisms and which are now German despite having English origins.

As an American, there is no way for me to understand what it is like to see a foreign language embraced in my country. There are certain areas of the United States that have adopted foreign languages as the primary language, but this is often because of the population of immigrants in that area. Of course, English, similarly to other languages, has integrated a number of loanwords from foreign languages, in large part since the significant population of immigrants throughout American and British history. In recent years, Spanish has been growing in popularity in the US but American English is not adopting more Spanish vocabulary. Unlike German where the use of English is due to connotations and the image English presents, the use of Spanish in America is a necessity. The United State's huge Spanish-speaking population makes the use of Spanish a requirement, not a way to alter the identity of someone or something, but for the practical reason of

communication. This use of Spanish affects identity and culture in the United States, though

currently, the influences are not strongly experienced nationwide.

Integrating English

There are a number of issues surrounding the usage and integration of English words. These

differences mean that there are no standardized rules for Denglish and Anglicisms, which can

increase the chances of misunderstandings and confusion when having a conversation.

In order to allow for the use of English words often become Germanized. This is done

through alterations in spelling, conjugation, declinations, and assignment of gender, though the way

that the English expressions are integrated is handled differently depending on the user. How do

people not get confused? Using the phenomena of online text speak as an example, nobody was

taught the acronyms and symbols that are now commonly used with communication online through

text, and yet entire conversations can be conducted using this language. The same acronym may

have multiple meanings, but based on who wrote the message as well as prior knowledge of online

text speak, a reader can figure out what is being said. The same thing happens with Denglish.

Although people may spell words slightly differently based on their preferences, knowledge and

familiarity of the conversation partner as well as with Denglish allows for easy communication.

A user can either treat the English words as German words, or they can do the same thing

but with translations provided (Locher 323). Examples of the different integration methods are seen

below with the English terms bolded. In the first quote, genders are assigned to the English words

and expressions. The second example has a German translation provided immediately following the

English term. One will notice though, that not every bolded English term in the second example has

a translation. Part of the reasoning for the lack of translations may be that the bolded words are already well-integrated into German and therefore require no explanation.

> *Die einzelnen Steckplätze der **Backplane** müssen die Möglichkeit bieten, die **Daisy-Chain** durchzuschleifen, falls in den Steckplatz ein **Bus-Slave-Modul** eingesetzt werden soll.*

> *Bei einer dritten Lösung, dem **Bus-Snooping** ("Bus-Schnüffeln„) oder **Bus-Watching** ("Bus-Beobachtung„), beobachtet die Cache-Steuerung den **Bus** hinsichtlich der Speicherzugriffe anderer **Master**. (Locher 2008)*

As the example above illustrates, the writer must decide what English words are unknown and must be translated for the reader when providing the German translation. Obviously, this causes problems when the author overestimates the knowledge of the target readers and doesn't provide sufficient or enough translations from English to German, since the reader cannot completely understand the writing. Another way of dealing with Anglicisms would be changing the spelling to a Germanized form of spelling. This can also influence how the word is pronounced. This may not cause problems when one is simply reading the words, but if the writing was to be read aloud, then should English or German pronunciation be used (Locher 324)?

If the word is Germanized, then how exactly should it be done? Should the word keep its English spelling, but have additions made in order to allow the word to be used like a proper German word? Should a word such as "to forward" become "forwarden", or maybe in order to spell it the German way, "vorwarden". Past tense involves a number of questions as well. Would it be "hat geforwarden", "gevorwarden", or "vorgewarden"? This doesn't include the past participle -et ending which hasn't been included in the above examples (Locher 331-334). When the German

spelling is chosen, "vor"can become a separable prefix. No matter how the word is spelled, it seems

a majority of German speakers still understand and recognize the word due to the widespread use of

it, especially since many of these words are now included in recent editions of Duden and can be

located through a simple online search on the Duden website.

Denglish Prone Groups

A number of different institutions, groups, people are currently under attack in Germany for

language disloyalty through the use of Denglish. These groups include: "... the advertising industry,

schools and universities…, the legal establishment, and the EU..." (Dodd 63). In this section, we will

be exploring a select few of these groups in detail in order to understand how and why they use

English.

Advertising

Anglicism usage is very prevalent in advertisements. Depending on the target demographic

group as well as the type of product, the amount of English used in advertising varies significantly,

this is seen in Figure 2, which shows the percentage of Anglicisms used for various products. These

numbers come from a study of billboard advertisements in Graz in 1996, so these percentages may

have changed since then.

Percent of Anglicisms Used in Advertisements
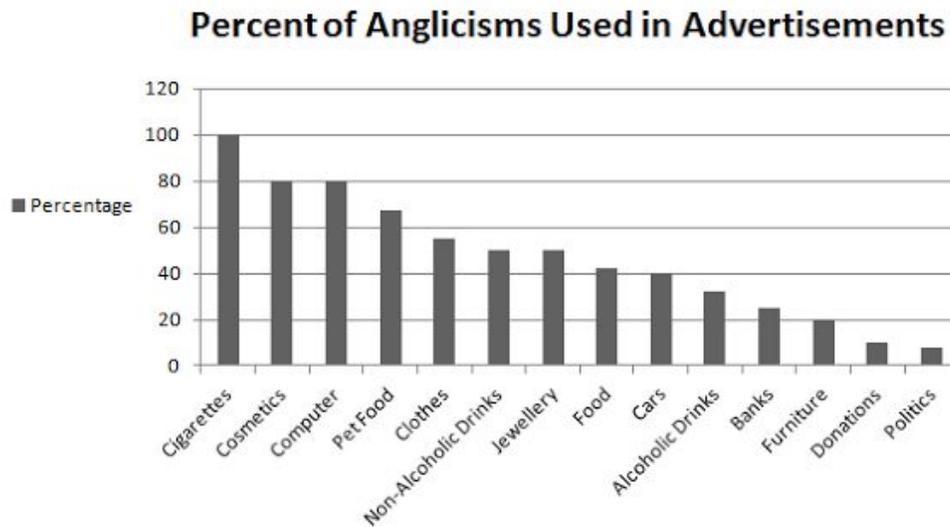
Figure 2: Created from Data from Kettemann, 2002

According to Ketteman: "English lends prestige, modernity, mobility, in-group feelings, youth, etc. to the products advertised" ("Anglicisms in German: Enrichment or Intrusion?"). This effect is illustrated in Figure 2 since products such as cigarettes and cosmetics which allow people to feel cool, beautiful, and/or young use a high percentage of English in the advertisements in comparison to less cool and popular items such as politics and furniture. Although a majority of cigarette and cosmetic companies originate in the United States, the high use of English in advertising abroad seems strange considering that reaching the largest audience possible through the use of German in Germany would be the priority. Instead, English is used to attract customers. This use of English for certain items can shift perspectives. Items that use English are considered stylish and modern. Similar products that use German might be considered old-fashioned or lame. It doesn't matter if the products are the same, the use of English adds prestige due to the associations with modernity, freedom, and internationality (Scherling 38). English is not the only language whose

stereotype is extorted for advertisements and business. French, with it's associations with love, sex, and sophistication, is often used for perfume, soap, cheese, clothing, etc. Italian, with it's links to art, music and fashion, is also a popular choice when dealing with food, clothing, and other aesthetic items.

This increased usage of Anglicisms can lead to exclusivity. Exclusivity in this context is created by the increasing use of English words and English-only advertisements, which therefore directs the ad to those who speak or understand English. If someone misreads or mis-translates the advertisement, then the point of the ad has been lost. This is often worked around using Denglish, which allows German speakers not fluent in English to decode the ad through the use of photographs, German words provided, and prior knowledge or the product or brand (Barbe 29).

Figure 3 shows one of many Denglish advertisements from *Berliner Stadtreinigung* (BSR), the largest municipal waste disposal company in Germany, demonstrates Denglish in advertising. Even if a customer did not know the meaning of the English words in the advertisement, the person's knowledge of BSR combined with the German words and the photo, allows one to deduce that the meaning of the advertisement has something to do with BSR and how they clean the streets and manage waste in Berlin. This is best expressed by the book *Wordplay and Metalinguistic*

"...because of the semantics of the German verb *kehren* 'to sweep,' the catch phrase exposes the daily services of the company. ... What is hidden below the surface and adds another layer of meaning is the formulaic expression *We care for you*, which is retrievable because the verb form *kehr* is phonetically close to a potential Germanized pronunciation of the English verb *care*."

Figure 3: BSR Advertisement (Berliner Stadtreinigungsbetriebe)

Figure 4 below illustrates how English can be used to include groups of people. The main

point of the sign is to indicate a sale, but the largest and most prominent text is in English, with the

German translation being set below in a smaller font in square brackets. English is being used here

to target a customers who speak English. The German subtitle allows Germans who may not

understand the English to still participate in the sale. The use of English words allows companies to

portray a certain image of modernity, worldliness, and intelligence, which helps with business by

alluring the target demographic through the idea that you are educated, wealthy, and well-traveled.

Figure 4: Sale

There are instances where the use of English backfires in advertising. A very well-known

example is a slogan from the German perfume chain Douglas. The slogan, "Come In and Find Out"

confused the majority of Germans, since they understood the slogan to mean that they should enter

the store and then find the exit ("Come In and Find Out"). This demonstrates that despite English's

positive connotations, the use of English can still prove detrimental. According to a survey by the

Eurobarometer from 2005, only 50% of Germans speak English, this number only includes those

who feel they are fluent in English and not Germans who can speak passable English (*Europeans and*

Languages). This means that the amount of Germans who can actually understand the English words

in advertisements could be higher than reported in the survey, though whether they actually

understand the meaning of the advertisement is still unknown.

Technology

A common location for Anglicisms is in technology. Words such as "Computer", "to

download" and "Internet" are all found in German with simple changes made to spelling in order to

Germanize the word. The overwhelming role of the US in developing technology and the internet

therefore means that most of the terminology is also in English (Barbe 29-30). From computer code to electronic gadgets, the majority of words are in English. Figure 5 below illustrates the use of Anglicisms on German websites in 2000. Around a third of words were related to the computer and/or internet, ⅖ were related to advertising, the the remainder were other. These numbers have changed in the time between Schlobinski's publication and this paper, but evidently the usage of Anglicisms has not decreased despite the continued complaints and suggested solutions in Germany in order to reduce the frequency of Denglish.
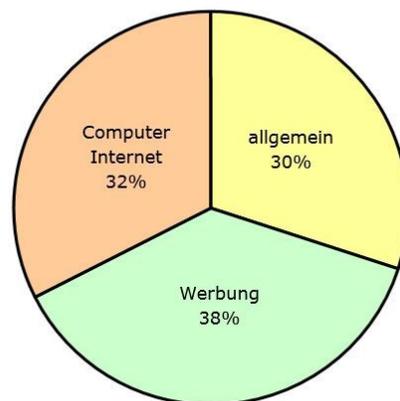
Figure 5: Anglicisms on Websites (Schlobinski)

Schlobinski gives a number of examples of English words that are either redundant and also examples of words that cannot be replaced by German words online (5). A select few of the unavoidable words and their appropriate German translation are in Table 1, while select needless words are in Table 2. A variety of words has since been added to Schlobinski's lists due to the advancement of technology; smartphones, twitter, facebook, etc. were all invented after the year 2000.

Table 1: Suggested Replacements for English Words (Schlobinski 5)

English	German
E-mail	E-Post
Mouse	Maus
Screen	Bildschirm

Table 2: Existing Denglish with Respective German Words

Denglish	German
chatten	plaudern, schwatzen
downloaden	herunterladen,
texten	schicken, simsen

As illuminated by a study from Brigham Young University, a possible reason for the use of English words for technology could be a lack of knowledge about the equivalent German term or generally, the widespread use of the English words, therefore making English the norm instead of the German counterpart (Lush).

**Business and Media**

The expansion of business from local to national to international has created problems concerning language policy and communications within the companies. In Germany, English has become the official co-language of many companies, especially those that work on an international level (Ammon). For many companies that are hiring in Germany, English is not just an asset on CVs

but is instead a requirement for all employees (Ehrenreich). A study by Tessa Lush and

Hans-Wilhelm Kelling from Brigham Young University revealed that the three most common

answers for why Germans use English are: first, dealing with international clients and colleagues;

second, because of international business partners; third, for the technical terms available in English.

As for the "why" concerning the use of English, the top answers were that Germans were expected

to speak English and that there are English words with unknown German equivalents. The

increased use of English, even in settings where everyone can speak and understand German, for

example at the CEO level of big companies such as Bosch, has caused problems in recognizing

when to switch back to German (Mechan-Schmidt "German Business Goes Bilingual."). Meetings

can occur and only after some time has passed will the participants realize that English isn't required

and revert to speaking in German (Ehrenreich).

English words are preferred over German in business when English is used for a specific

term. German is favored when the word is more general or is commonly used outside of the

business environment. The use of English for technical terms is because of the idea that English is

more descriptive and therefore lends itself better to discuss a specific word (Lush).

What about companies that are not international or that are limited to Europe only? The

Deutsche Bahn is notorious for the use of Denglish, although this usage can be justified since

Deutsche Bahn operates transnationally. Although some words such as "...brunch, container,

sandwich and VIP…" are acceptable since they have been integrated into the German language

("No Denglisch; German Business and English"). In 2013, the Deutsche Bahn issued guidelines for

its employees to replace 2,200 Anglicisms with their German counterparts. Some of these

Anglicisms are easy to exchange for the German counterpart such as "Flyer" becoming

"Handzettel". Other Anglicisms are trickier, since potential tourists and travelers from outside

Germany may need to use certain services such as the Deutsche Bahn's "Rent a Bike" service.

Promotional material will contain a German explanation for those who don't understand the English

("Deutsche Bahn to Ditch English"). Other phrases which have caused confusion such as "Rail &

Fly" have instead been supplemented by the appropriate German translation and clarification

("Deutsche Bahn aims to roll back use of English."). "Rail & Fly" is now accompanied by a German

subtitle explaining the service: "mit dem Zug zum Flug". More local companies and businesses have

no reason to use Denglish. German bakeries, for example, only cater to local customers. There is no

need for superfluous English words or phrases.
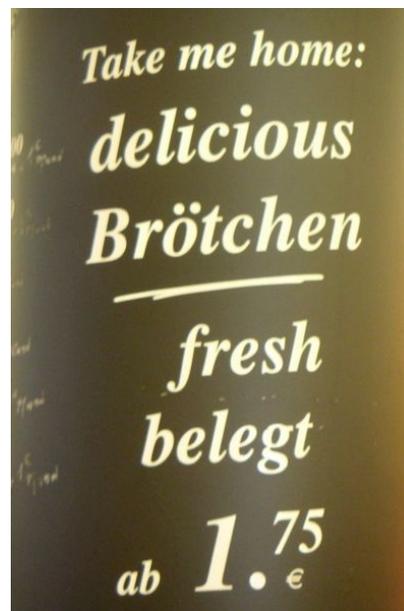
Figure 6: Take Me Home

Many newspapers and journals also employ business terminology, mainly in headlines, in

order to appeal to the reader and catch their eye. Again, the prestige and modernity of English is

used as a marketing tool by businesses in order to attract customers (Barbe 30). Lush and Dr.

Kelling's study found 658 English words across 100 articles, with each word being counted only one per article. The articles were compiled from three major German newspapers; Süddeutsche Zeitung in Munich, and Wirtschaftswoche and Handelsblatt in Düsseldorf. All of the English words that were included in the count were English-only, meaning no blending of English and German (i.e. Webseite, Werkshop, etc) (Lush). This demonstrates how prevalent English has become in German society. With a frequency of 6.58 pure English words per article, the widespread use of English in business and media does not seem as though it will decrease anytime soon.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Throughout this paper, the connections between language, culture, and identity have been examined and explored, specifically the pros and cons of English on German language, culture, and identity. Ever since "Denglish" first started appearing in publications in the 1960s, the prevalence of English and it's influences has only increased in Germany and German speaking countries. As seen throughout my research, the use and impact of English will continue despite attempts to control the pressures.

Of course, throughout this paper only the influence of English on Germany and Standard German was examined. Further research could be done concerning Austrian German and Swiss German. Swiss German especially could take a look at other types of language integration, due to the multilingual nature of the country.

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