One of the little factoids you pick up in this country is that most of the complaints made to the BBC relate to poor English. We know that languages are constantly changing so we may not agree with all complaints (my mother really misses the 1950s), yet we realise from professional observation that sloppy usage obscures meaning.

A few years ago my son, David, visited me in Munich. He pointed to an advertising hoarding and said "Wellness isn't an English word, is it?" "It is here," I replied.

Wolf Schneider believes that modern German uses an abundance of unnecessary English words. There are several reasons but the most common is the widely held belief that plain German no longer cuts the mustard, so writers sex up their output by larding it with English terms. The author has nothing against English (as a reader you get the impression he speaks it rather well), but feels that the 60% of the German population who don't speak English are being patronised.

All languages absorb words from other languages because they describe an object or concept that does not exist in the importing language, or because they are the vehicle for something novel.

The author challenges the German mania for substituting English words for perfectly good German ones and upbraids the PR industry for swamping Germans in a flood of pointless and imperfectly understood English.

Here are some words used in Germany and their perfectly good yet eschewed German equivalents:

Pipeline: Rohrleitung
Slow motion: Zeitlupe
Highlight: Höhepunkt

The German Railways used to call their information kiosks "Auskunft," but now they have morphed into "Service Points".

Some of the Anglicisms are really odd. In English we talk about Mexico City and in Spanish Ciudad
de México. In German instead of the logical Mexico Stadt, it's called Mexiko City - thus bizarrely importing the English name of a Spanish-speaking metropolis.

The German advertising industry has conducted a torrid affair with English, but one that appears to have left most of the country perplexed. On the left are examples of English slogans used in German adverts and on the right what people thought the slogans meant:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English slogan used</th>
<th>What people thought it meant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive Alive</td>
<td>Survive the journey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimulate your senses</td>
<td>Stimulate yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Come in and find out</td>
<td>Come in and find the exit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are drivers too</td>
<td>We are two drivers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A few years ago a survey of businesses in the UK found that employees do not like their bosses speaking in business jargon. They don't understand and would like people simply to say what they mean. The problem is compounded when the jargon is in a foreign language, and the problems are not just aesthetic. The Economist wrote that one of the causes of the failure of the Walmart chain in Germany was the fact that the German managers only spoke to each other in English.

Clearly this book will be of interest only to speakers of German, but it certainly mirrors concern about standards in English.[1] And it appeals to the inner pedant in all of us.

The latter part of the book looks at coining new words to replace Anglicisms. I particularly like:

Laptop:                        Klapprechner
E-Commerce:              Netzhandel
Spam:                          E-Müll
Just-in-time:                 termingerecht

The author also looks in some detail at how to improve standards of German by teaching the language properly in schools. I hear echoes of calls from my contemporaries for a return to the teaching of grammar. Bring back box analysis.

This short book shows that there are people who care as much about language as we do.


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**Recommended citation format:**