

German in English

Kron

English is a Germanic language, but it diverged from the language that is the ancestor of Modern German about 1,500 years ago. Most English words that come from German are relatively recent borrowings. German borrowings are especially common in intellectual fields, including science, philosophy, and psychology.

Note that all nouns in German are capitalized; in English they sometimes have a capital and sometimes don't, depending on whether they are felt to be German words used in English or fully naturalized borrowings. In the following lists, we have given everything in lowercase.

angst (ängkst) a feeling of dread, anxiety, or anguish.

ersatz (er'zäts, -säts) fake; synthetic; artificial.

festschrift (fest'shrift') a volume of scholarly articles contributed by many authors to commemorate a senior scholar or teacher.

gemütlichkeit (*Ger.* gə myt'likh kīt') comfortable friendliness; cordiality; congeniality.

gestalt (gə shtält') a form having properties that cannot be derived by the summation of its component parts.

götterdämmerung (got'ər dam'ə rōng') total destruction or downfall, as in a great final battle.

kitsch (kich) something of tawdry design, appearance, or content created to appeal to people having popular or indiscriminating taste.

lebensraum (lā'bəns roum') additional space needed to function.

realpolitik (rā äl'pō' lē tēk') political realism; specifically, a policy based on power rather than ideals.

schadenfreude (shäd'n froi'də) pleasure felt at another's misfortune.

weltanschauung (vel'tän shou'ōng) world-view; a comprehensive conception of the universe and humanity's relation to it.

weltschmerz (velt'shmerts') sorrow that one feels is one's necessary portion in life; sentimental pessimism.

doppelgänger (dop'əl gang'ər) phantom double; a ghostly counterpart of a living person; alter ego; dead ringer.

echt (EKHT) real; authentic; genuine.

kaput (kā pōōt', -pōōt') finished, ruined; broken.

leitmotif (līt'mō tēf') a recurring theme; a motif in a dramatic work that is associated with a particular person, idea, or situation.

lumpenproletariat (lum'pən prō'li tār'ē ət) a crude and uneducated underclass comprising unskilled laborers, vagrants, and criminals.

poltergeist (pōl'tər gīst') a ghost that makes loud knocking or rapping noises.

sturm and drang (shtōorm' ōont dräng') turmoil; tumult; upheaval; extreme emotionalism.

übermensch (ōō'bər mensh') superman; an ideal superior being.

verboten (fər bōt'n, vər-) forbidden; prohibited.

wanderlust (won'dər lust') a strong desire to travel.

wunderkind (vōon'dər kind', wun'-) prodigy; gifted child; a person who succeeds at an early age.

zeitgeist (tsīt'gīst', zīt'-) the spirit of the time; the general trend of thought and feeling that is characteristic of the era.

Überbabes and spritzers

War inevitably influenced Germany's 20th-century contributions to our language, but **German** has given us many other terms, including some that handily fill in where there is no English equivalent.

TAKE dogs, for example. The **poodle** is now considered to be a cute, pampered little breed of dog, but it was bred as a hunting dog to retrieve waterfowl shot by its master, and its name is from German *Pudelhund* 'puddle dog'. The **dachshund** is often called a 'sausage dog' because of its long body, but it is literally a 'badger dog'—the breed was used to dig badgers out of their setts.

Since the 1920s we have criticized objects regarded as garish or sentimental as **kitsch**. At times this may be seen as a type of intellectual snobbery—in May 1961 *The Times* made a reference to 'highbrows... who consider that the quality of the pure entertainment as such is generally *kitsch* or trash'. We might feel that this sort of thing was **ersatz**, or 'artificial', and add that it should be **verboten**, or 'forbidden'.

But there is no avoiding the language of war. **Flak** or 'anti-aircraft fire', borrowed directly from German in the 1930s, is an abbreviation of *Fliegerabwehrkanone*, literally 'aviator-defence-gun'. By the 1960s it was sufficiently established in English for the extended sense 'strong criticism' to develop.

In September 1940 **blitz** appeared in *Daily Express* reports of the heavy air raids made by the **Luftwaffe** (the German air force, a combination of 'air' and 'weapon') on London. **Blitz** is a shortening of **blitzkrieg**, which had been used the previous year to describe the German invasion of Poland. In German *Blitzkrieg* means 'lightning war'. The metaphorical use 'a sudden concerted effort to deal with something' came up in the *Guardian* in 1960: 'The women did only the bare essentials of housework during the week, with a "blitz" at weekends.'

A **spritzer** is a mixture of wine and soda water named after the German word for 'a splash'. In the 1980s this drink was certainly in tune with the **zeitgeist**, or 'spirit of the time'. Since the 1990s we have used the German word for 'over', *über*, to form words expressing the idea of the ultimate form of something—supermodels are sometimes referred to as **überbabes**.

German was the language used by the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) and his Swiss collaborator Carl Jung (1875–1961), and has given us several words for feelings. **Angst**, vague worry about the human condition or the world in general, entered English in the 1940s. **Weltanschauung**, from *Welt* 'world' and *Anschauung* 'perception', means 'individual philosophy, world view'. Until the 1890s English had no word for the regrettably familiar feeling of pleasure derived from another person's misfortune, and so imported one from Germany—**schadenfreude** combines 'harm' and 'joy'.

See also DUDE, HAMSTER, HEROIN, LAGER, QUEER, TRADE

German words

We think of Germany as a great manufacturing nation, and the practical research on which it is based has contributed significantly to English vocabulary. **Aspirin** [L19th] is a German invention, formed from *acetylierte Spirsäure* 'acetylated salicylic acid', the *Spir-* element referring to the plant *Spiraea* from which it originally came. So is **heroin** [L19th], coined from the Latin for 'hero' because of the effect the drug had on users' self-esteem. Although it is based on Latin *parum* 'little' and *affinis* 'related' because of its low reactivity, **paraffin** [M19th] is also a German coinage. In the 16th century Germany was a world leader in mining and this gives us *slag [M16th] and **cobalt** [L17th] from *Kobalt* 'imp, demon', because its ore was mixed with the silver ore the miners wanted and they believed it made it more difficult to mine. In engineering Germany gives us the **automat** [L17th] based on Latin *automaton* and **spanner** [L18th] formed from *spannen* 'draw tight'.

Germany has also given us many dog breeds. **Poodle** [E19th] is from *Pudelhund* 'puddle hound', for they were bred to retrieve waterfowl; **dachshund** [L19th] means 'badger hound', for they were bred to go down badger setts; **Rottweilers** [E20th] get their name from the German town of Rottweil; and **schnauzers** get theirs from *Schnauze* 'muzzle, snout'.

In the arts Germany contributed the **Bildungsroman** [E20th], literally an 'education novel'; the spooky **doppelgänger** [M19th] or double that features in so many horror stories; the **leitmotiv** [L19th] 'leading motive'; and **wine, women, and song**, *Wein, Weib, und Gesang*, popularized as the title of an 1869 Johann Strauss waltz, but recorded much earlier; **wunderkind** [L19th], a child prodigy especially in music; **waltz** [L18th] from *walzen* 'revolve'; and **kitsch** [E20th], along with **ersatz** [L19th] for an inferior substitute.

German love of the outdoors gives us **wanderlust** [E20th], **hinterland** [L19th] 'behind land', and **abseil** [1930s] from *ab* 'down' and *Seil* 'rope'. Other pleasures of life are reflected in **fest** [M19th] 'festival'; **lager** [M19th] from *Lagerbier* 'beer brewed for keeping', from *Lager* 'storehouse'; the **spritzer** [1960s], German for 'splash'; and many types of cake which you might want to **dunk** [E20th] from *dunke* 'dip', the Pennsylvanian German dialect form of German *tunken*. While your infant is in **kindergarten** [M19th] 'children's garden', you can **stroll** [E17th], formed from *Strolch* 'vagabond', and **loaf**, a back-formation from **loafer** [M19th] from *Landläufer* 'tramp'.

Some German military words were borrowed into English during the two world wars. **Flak** [M20th], 'anti-aircraft fire', is an abbreviation of *Fliegerabwehrkanone*, literally 'aviator-defence gun'. By the 1960s it was sufficiently established in English for the extended sense of 'strong criticism' to develop. **Blitz**, a shortening of *Blitzkrieg* 'lightning war', described the German invasion of Poland of 1939. In the First World War **strafe** for a heavy bombardment was an ironic borrowing of the German catchphrase *Gott strafe England* 'may God punish England'.

While **angst** [E20th] is simply the German for 'fear', German's ability to create words to describe feelings by combining two elements into one word is shown in **zeitgeist** [M19th] from *Zeit* 'time' plus *Geist* 'spirit', and **schadenfreude** [M19th] from *Schaden* 'harm' and *Freude* 'joy'. One combining form that has been adopted into English is **uber-** [M20th] (German *über*) as an alternative to its equivalent 'super', to form words such as 'uber-geek'. This is formed on the pattern of **Übermensch**, the original Superman, a term coined by the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in 1883.

German

Given that both the Austrian psychotherapist Sigmund Freud and his Swiss collaborator Carl Jung were German speakers, it is appropriate that the language has furnished a number of useful terms to describe human psychology and emotions. Among these are *angst*, *Weltanschauung*, *Weltschmerz*, and *Zeitgeist*. German borrowings also include words for a number of concepts for which there is no straightforward English equivalent, such as *realpolitik* (politics based on practical considerations), *Schadenfreude* (pleasure derived from someone else's misfortune), and *wanderlust* (a strong desire to travel).

Familiar items of German food (many bought from the *delicatessen*, another German word) include *bratwurst*, *frankfurter*, *pretzel*, *pumpernickel*, *sauerkraut*, *schnitzel*, *strudel*, and *wurst*. Inevitably, a number of German words associated with warfare were adopted into English in the 20th century as a result of the Second World War. These include *blitzkrieg*, *führer*, *Gestapo*, *panzer*, and *Reich*. Among the dozens of other common words borrowed from German are *abseil*, *doppelgänger*, *ersatz*, *gesundheit*, *kaput*, *kindergarten*, *kitsch*, *leitmotiv*, *poltergeist*, *spiel*, *spritzer*, *über-*, and *umlaut*.