




Brevity of expression and conveying modernity from the perspective of journalists

Shorter Article

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Although English has no official status in countries of the expanding circle such as Germany (Kachru, 1985), English words and phrases, which are also referred to as anglicisms, can often be found in German mass media texts (Czech Rogoyska & Zboch, 2016; Fiedler, 2022; Glahn, 2002; Knospe, 2014; Onysko, 2004, 2007). In this context, previous research has paid much attention to the stylistic functions of anglicisms used by the mass media, often analysing brevity of expression and pragmatic functions of anglicisms, in particular how anglicisms are used to convey modernity (amongst others Piller, 2001; Winter–Froemel, Onysko & Calude, 2014). While such studies are usually exclusively based on analyses of German media corpora, this article enhances the current discourse on the developments around stylistic functions of English in German media texts by providing some insights from a larger research project which investigates shaping factors on radio content production and radio journalists' perspectives on the use of anglicisms in the newsroom. In line with the overall results of the larger project, the analysis presented in this paper provides a brief overview of selected interview statements by adult contemporary radio journalists on whether anglicisms are used for reasons of brevity of expression and on their attitudes towards the use of English for conveying modernity on radio. The format of adult contemporary radio in Germany, in particular, has had a strong connection to the English language and Anglo-American culture from its very beginning, which makes it a prime example for such an analysis.

English, German radio and the adult contemporary format

During the occupation of Germany after the Second World War, German broadcasting institutions were rebuilt by the Allied forces as a network of several independent public service broadcasters modelled after the BBC (for more substantial discussions see Schaefer, 2021b, 2024). Simultaneously, the transformation of Germany into a market economy in the post-war years allowed for an influx of Anglo-American cultural products, such as music and movies. In line with these developments, linguists have recorded a notable increase in anglicism use in German media after 1945 (Carstensen & Busse, 1993; Onysko, 2004). Borrowings into German also include English journalistic terminology, such as *Wording*, *Bumper*, *over-voiced* and *Jingle*, which have become standard vocabulary in German professional journalistic practice. Following the creation of a private broadcasting sector in the 1980s, inspired by the free American broadcasting market, both the public service and the new private stations in Germany largely adopted American production strategies and programme formats, which have retained English proper names such as *Contemporary Hit Radio*, *Adult Contemporary* or *News/Talk*. In the adult contemporary format, all parts of a station's radio programme are designed to attract a predefined target audience (between 25 and 49 years of age). The predominantly English-language music played (i.e. contemporary pop music mixed with popular hits of the last three decades) and the speech of journalists, which includes the use of English words and phrases on air, are aligned to create a harmonious acoustic flow of the radio programme for the listener (see Schaefer, 2022, 2024).

Analysis

While the larger project on anglicisms in German radio is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, this paper gives a brief overview of the key

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findings of the qualitative interviews with journalists in relation to using anglicisms for the purposes of brevity of expression and conveying modernity. In addition, it provides some further detail on other findings of the project (for a comprehensive overview of the overall results of the larger project see Schaefer, 2024). Sixty hours of German radio morning show content of the three largest public service and private adult contemporary stations (in terms of audience shares) and their largest competitors in their individual broadcasting areas were taped in 2016 as part of the larger research project. Excluding music and commercial advertisements, the radio corpus contains approximately 20 hours of spoken journalistic content.

After transcribing the spoken parts of the corpus, a quantitative analysis of anglicisms in the radio corpus was carried out. By using several reference works such as the *Anglizismen Wörterbuch* (Carstensen & Busse, 1993–6), the OED Online, the *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch* (2014) and the *Duden Fremdwörterbuch* (2015) and conducting a synchronic analysis of the phonological and graphemic salience of anglicisms (Onysko, 2007), anglicisms were detected and counted in the radio corpus of 202,000 tokens. Overall, the corpus contained 3174 anglicisms (1.57 per cent). This included borrowings, pseudo-anglicisms, hybrid anglicisms and codeswitches. Borrowings are English lexical items where English word forms and their meanings are transferred as units from English and become established in German. In the case of pseudo-anglicisms, English lexical material is used to create a new sign in German that is unknown in English. Anglicisms referred to as hybrids consist of English and German elements joined together in a process of word formation. Codeswitches appear as single and multi-word units and indicate when a speaker switches between two languages in a stretch of discourse (see Onysko, 2007). All anglicisms found in the corpus were then analysed qualitatively for their use in context including their stylistic functions on radio.

Based on this analysis of anglicisms, nineteen semi-structured interviews with professional journalists involved in the production of the transcribed broadcasting content were conducted.¹ All journalists were above 18 years of age, and in order to get a wide range of perspectives on the use of anglicisms, interviewees included staff from the radio stations working in various professional roles, such as producers, hosts, presenters and editors. Interviewees were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. All interviews were approximately one hour in length and conducted in German either at each of the stations or at a public meeting place. Questions for interviews largely concerned journalists' working routines and practices in the newsroom, such as writing and editing content. This way, it was possible to attain an insight into journalists' possible motivations for using an anglicism, such as for reasons of brevity of expression and conveying modernity.

Anglicisms and brevity of expression

Several studies on anglicisms in media texts largely based on analyses of mass media corpora have highlighted the use of

anglicisms for reasons of brevity of expression. In his analysis of German print media texts, Pfitzner (1978), for example, states that newspaper journalists work under constant pressures regarding time and space constraints. In their endeavour to rephrase news agency texts to fit into the frame of the printed page of their papers, they prefer to use short words, which benefits the use of anglicisms since these are often shorter than possible German equivalents. Similarly, Sagmeister–Brandner (2008) describes how Austrian broadcast journalists' contributions have to meet strict timing requirements and states that journalists occasionally make use of anglicisms to save time on air. In a statistical analysis of anglicism use in a German corpus consisting largely of newspaper texts, Winter–Froemel et al. (2014) show that the shorter an anglicism is in comparison to its German equivalent, the more successful (i.e. frequent) it is. Furthermore, Picone (1996: 56) states that the brevity of anglicisms compared to their equivalents in other languages makes them particularly interesting for advertising purposes and during 'the redaction of journalistic text'.

The radio corpus results point to a greater use of anglicisms that are shorter than their German equivalents (1792 out of a total of 2585 tokens for which there would have been a suitable German equivalent were shorter in terms of number of syllables). Examples of anglicisms that are shorter than their equivalents and occurred frequently in the radio corpus are the anglicisms *Mix* (for which the German noun *Mischung* could have been used instead) and *Event* (which could have been replaced by the noun *Veranstaltung* in German). The interviews with journalists have, however, revealed that brevity is not generally a decisive factor. According to the interviewees, using an anglicism for reasons of brevity of expression can lead to comprehension problems for their listeners (see Schaefer, 2019, 2024), which need to be avoided. As one journalist stated:

Im Zweifelsfall lieber eine deutsche Umschreibung, als einen Anglizismus.
(When in doubt, it is better to use a German paraphrase than an anglicism.)

Another journalist stated that if a potentially unknown anglicism would nevertheless be used on radio, it would have to be additionally translated or explained to listeners, and he gave the following example.

Ein Podcaster interviewt einen erfolgreichen Unternehmer, sagt, „so, . . . jetzt hau doch nochmal echt ein Gold-Nugget raus für unsere Hörer“, ja. Das muss ich das erste Mal nachschauen, was sie damit meinen. Das würde ich zum Beispiel on air so nicht benutzen, weil dafür ist es noch zu früh, . . . ich müsste es immer erklären. (A podcaster interviews a successful entrepreneur and says, 'so, . . . how about another *Gold-Nugget* for our listeners'. I have to look up what they mean by that the first time. I wouldn't use that on air like that, for example, because it would be too early for that, . . . I would always have to explain it.)

In line with this journalist's statement, another journalist explained regarding his use of anglicisms:

Also ich sage mal so, man kann das ja immer an sich selber testen. Wenn ich das nicht kapiere, dann nachfragen muss, dann denke ich mir, dass es vielleicht einige andere auch tun müssen und dann würde ich schon sagen, dass man es übersetzt.

(Well, I would say you can always test it on yourself. If I don't understand it and then have to ask, then I think that maybe some others have to do it too and then I would say that you should translate it.)

However, explaining or translating potentially unfamiliar anglicisms to their listeners would result in journalists' wordings becoming longer. In the genres of station imaging (the self-advertisement of radio stations) and news, for example, where the language used on air needs to be short and precise, making phrasings longer is not regarded as productive by the interviewees. According to a news presenter, anglicisms are preferably only used in the genre of news

wenn es dann tatsächlich auch jeder versteht, wenn klar ist, ich muss nicht immer wieder sagen was ein Smartphone ist.

(if everyone actually understands it, if it's clear that I don't have to keep saying what a *Smartphone* is.)

The overall findings of how novel anglicisms are used in the radio corpus have additionally revealed that potentially unknown anglicisms are therefore either not used at all in these genres or are contextually explained. In contrast, the following two examples from the radio corpus show that in the genres of service (in which consumer-related issues are discussed and listeners are introduced to new consumer products) and host talk, where journalists can talk more freely and have more time to get their message across to the listener, journalists translate or explain anglicisms that are perceived by them as too novel to comprehend for their audience (for an extensive discussion on novel anglicisms see Schaefer, 2021a). Example (1) shows the translation of the anglicism *Organic Cotton* as *Bio-Baumwolle*, and example (2) shows the explanation of the dog breed *Shetland-Sheep-Dog* as 'Andreas Hund . . . so ein kleiner, süßer Spitz'.²

(1) Erstens natürlich Bio einkaufen und das Bio bezieht sich nicht nur auf Lebensmittel, auch auf Baumwolle. Denn gerade beim Baumwollanbau wird oft ohne Rücksicht auf Verluste gespritzt. Schon deshalb macht es Sinn Klamotten zu kaufen auf denen Organic Cotton, Bio-Baumwolle steht.

(First of all, buy organic, and that does not only relate to groceries but also to cotton. In particular when cotton is grown, pesticides are often applied regardless of the consequences. Hence it makes sense to buy clothes labelled as *Organic Cotton*, organic cotton.)

(2) Die ganze Nacht hat ja auch übrigens Andreas Hund, der Toni, ihr Shetland-Sheep-Dog, mit ausgehalten. Ja so ein kleiner, süßer Spitz und hat sie auch mit motiviert.

(By the way, Andrea's dog Toni, her Shetland sheepdog, also stayed up all night. He's a cute little spitz and also helped to motivate her.)

Overall, all interviewees have agreed that it is only okay to use an anglicism for achieving brevity of expression

wo es Kommunikation verkürzt, ohne eine Verständnislücke zu erzeugen.

(where it shortens communication without creating a gap in understanding.)

Therefore, according to the interviewees, comprehensibility of an anglicism is prioritised to using it for reasons of brevity of expression (see Schaefer, 2019, 2024), which contrasts with previous findings on anglicism use for reasons of brevity in mass media.

Anglicisms and conveying modernity

The use of English loanwords in relation to expressing modernity has received much attention by previous research on anglicism use in the mass media (amongst others Díaz, 2019; Onysko, 2007; Piller, 2001; Winter-Froemel et al., 2014). In these studies, various media corpora were again used as the basis for analysis, including newspapers, (online) magazines and advertisements. According to Tatsioka, who investigated Greek online magazines, 'English is inextricably intertwined with fashion, success, modernity, and trendiness' (2022: 14). This is in line with studies on German media texts such as by Piller (2001) and Onysko (2007), according to which English is used to convey polyglotism, modernity and progress. In line with previous research, many adult contemporary journalists stated that they think that anglicisms can convey modernity. According to a presenter:

Anglizismen wirken natürlich immer irgendwie dynamisch, wirken cool, wirken international, polyglott.

(Anglicisms of course always seem somehow dynamic, seem cool, seem international, polyglot.)

In line with this statement, his colleague explained:

Jeder der sagen will, „ich bin von Welt“, so ein bisschen, kann Englisch oder tut zumindest so, . . . und lässt dann mit so einem coolen englischen Wort entweder den Fachmann raushängen von „ich kenne mich total aus bei dem Thema“, oder eben, „ich bin bewandert, ich . . . habe die Welt gesehen“.

(Anyone who wants to say 'I'm cosmopolitan', a bit like that, knows English or at least pretends to, . . . and then uses a cool English word to show off as an expert like 'I know all about this topic' or 'I am knowledgeable, I have seen the world'.)

Regarding the use of anglicisms for reasons of conveying modernity, another journalist additionally confirmed that anglicisms are used

natürlich auch, weil es viel moderner ist, weil, ne, es klingt irgendwie, als wären wir alle schon in Silicon Valley gewesen und hätten uns da die neuesten Sachen angeguckt.

(of course, also because it's much more modern, because, well, it kind of sounds like we've all been to Silicon Valley and looked at the latest things there.)

However, as the overall results of the larger project have shown, this perception on the use of anglicisms is not generally shared by interviewees. Some journalists did not agree that anglicisms convey modernity and stated that using anglicisms rather connotes the opposite. Answering the question of whether he associates the use of anglicisms with expressing modernity, a journalist stated:

Überhaupt nicht, nein. Das ist glaube ich einfach eine Gewohnheit geworden, aber die ist jetzt schon so alt, dass ich nicht erkennen

kann, dass die für irgendwas Frisches stände.
(Not at all, no. I think that simply became a habit, but that is so old by now that I cannot see that it would represent anything fresh.)

In this context, all journalists were also asked whether sounding young is essential on radio. Some journalists explained that it is important on the one hand not to sound too old but on the other hand also not too young, as being authentic is the key to success with their listeners (see Schaefer, 2024). Using too many anglicisms, especially for the purpose of sounding trendy, cool or modern, could therefore even be counterproductive to achieve this goal. As one journalist stated:

Wenn wir jetzt versuchen mit so einer anbietend anglophilen Sprache daherzukommen, glauben wir, dass das eigentlich, . . . ich sage mal, das würde auch durchschaut werden, das ist nicht authentisch.
(If we now try to come across in such a chummy, anglophile language, we believe that this would actually . . . I'd say that would also be seen through, it's not authentic.)

The interviews have further revealed that while for some journalists it may be relevant to use certain anglicisms for the purpose of conveying modernity, the use of an anglicism also depends on what journalists want to communicate with the term to their audience. The anglicism *Hit*, for example, was frequently used in the radio corpus (with 297 tokens the most frequently used anglicism overall) where the German semantic near-equivalent *Schlager* (no tokens) or even the German noun *Lied* (8 tokens) could have been used instead.

- (3) Die perfekte Uhrzeit für einen brandneuen Hit.
(The perfect time for a brand-new hit.)
(4) Jetzt ein richtig sommerlicher Hit für euch gleich.
(A real summer hit for you shortly.)

A journalist explained that the German term *Lied* in contrast to *Hit* is more likely used for a children's song, and *Schlager* nowadays is commonly used for a specific type of music and genre, German Schlager music (Schaefer, 2019, 2024). *Hit*, however, connotes a successful song from the pop-music genre. Another journalist gave the example of using the borrowing *Show* instead of German *Sendung* to communicate a specific meaning. According to this journalist, *Show* is used, for example, in relation to their broadcast programme

weil die Show . . . so die große Unterhaltung, die ganz große Bühne ist.
(because a *Show* . . . is the big entertainment, the really big stage.)

This shows that subtle differences in pragmatic meanings of anglicisms in comparison to their near-equivalents in German additionally play a role when it comes to using these on radio (for further examples see Schaefer, 2019, 2024). Moreover, variation, precision, semantic reasons, repetition and giving emphasis to words were also named by the interviewees as affecting the use of an anglicism on radio (for an elaborate discussion on other stylistic functions of anglicisms see Schaefer, 2024).

In contrast to previous studies that have emphasised the use of anglicisms for purposes of expressing modernity in mass media texts, the statements presented in this paper – taken from the qualitative findings of the larger project on anglicisms in German radio language – have shown that the relationship between anglicisms and conveying modernity appears much more complex and multifaceted when considered from the journalists' perspective.

Conclusion

English words and phrases are frequently found in mass media communication in Germany. A substantial amount of research has therefore focussed on investigating the stylistic functions of anglicisms usually based exclusively on analyses of German mass media corpora. This article has gone beyond a linguistic discussion of anglicisms in media texts to give insights into whether anglicisms are used for reasons of brevity of expression on radio and for reasons of conveying modernity from the perspectives of German radio journalists.

Unlike previous research on anglicisms and their use for reasons of brevity of expression in media texts, the statements of journalists taken from the larger study show that anglicisms are not always used by adult contemporary radio journalists because they are the shorter option. Using anglicisms that are not known to the target audience for such purposes could cause comprehension problems, which is always problematic on radio. As all journalists agreed, translating, explaining or contextually explaining a potentially unknown anglicism is therefore necessary to avoid comprehension problems. This can, however, affect the length of a journalistic piece, which could then again be deemed unsuitable by radio journalists depending on the radio genre they are writing for. Therefore, where comprehension on behalf of the audience cannot be guaranteed, anglicisms are generally avoided and a German equivalent or paraphrase is used instead.

Concerning journalists potential use of anglicisms for conveying modernity, the statements of journalists from the qualitative results of the larger project show that while many journalists see anglicisms connected to modernity, some journalists perceive anglicisms as old fashioned and using too many English words and phrases on air as unauthentic and therefore unsuitable to reach their target audiences. Anglicisms are hence not generally used on adult contemporary radio in Germany to convey modernity. Subtle differences in pragmatic meanings and other stylistic functions are also relevant in this context. All in all, going beyond traditional corpus analysis to acknowledge speakers' attitudes towards the use of English in the expanding circle can give us valuable insights into the use of anglicisms in various domains, such as in mass media communication.

Acknowledgements. Example (1) is adopted from Schaefer (2021a).

Notes

- 1 Ethical approval for conducting interviews was given by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Galway (formerly NUI Galway).

2 Although the comparison between the two dog breeds is not entirely accurate, the journalist decided to explain the lesser-known Shetland sheepdog breed by comparing it to a more well-known dog breed in German.

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