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# *When a German says Beamer, he's not talking about his car*

**Laurie Bauer**
**WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE**

WE ARE all familiar with the words that have been borrowed from Maori into New Zealand English, and the words that have been borrowed from English into Maori.

On the one hand we have words like marae, rimu, tuatara, tui and so on; on the other side we have sheep borrowed as hipi, milk borrowed as miraka. school borrowed as kura and so on. In both cases the same kinds of pressure are at work. We borrow words for things that we have never met before and where the other language has a ready-made name.

There are other solutions: although it is no longer fashionable, the tui was once called the parson bird, for example, and there is still variation between white pine and kahikatea.

A brief stay in German-speaking Europe raises the question of what the English language is giving the rest of the world in terms of borrowed words. The answers are sometimes surprising.

The first obvious borrowed words you come across are trade names: McDonald's, Burger King, Johnnie Walker, Body Shop, and so on. Given that we have Mercedes, Toyota, Peugeot and Volkswagen, such borrowings are scarcely surprising. Occasionally, though, the slogans accompany the brand names: "Because you're worth it," said in English at the end of a German-language advertisement. But we correspondingly have "Vorsprung durch Technik" at the end of English language advertisements. Perhaps also surprising is that the product names sometimes (but not always) stay in English too. German for chicken wrap appears to be chicken wrap. On the other hand, the Toyota Yaris is here called the Aygo (presumably said as "I go").

Other words are less expected. All-purpose, business, chicken wings, counter (as in a bank) and download all have perfectly good German equivalents, and you have to ask what the use of the English word provides. There would seem to be some sort of prestige arising from the use of English in itself. That might also explain the English titles of German-language TV programmes such as "Austria's next top model" and AustriaNews.

I was also astounded to hear that the Germans have taken to using the English word "sorry". I even heard one person say "Sorry Verzeihung" (or "Sorry sorry"). Why is sorry different from the apparently corresponding German word to a sufficient extent to make it worth borrowing? I have not yet been able to discover this. It is not, of course, the only such case. The word meaning "thank you" in Zurich is merci, borrowed from French (at a much earlier period).

THE BEST jokes for the English speaker are those words that the locals think are English, but that are not. The obvious example of this is Handy, the German word for a mobile phone.

The case that has been most striking to me on this visit is the word Beamer. Although I came across this in Bavaria, the home of BMW cars, Beamer does not mean a BMW in German.

It means a projector for projecting the image from a computer onto a wall. It is apparently the normal word for this, and different from the word for a film projector or a slide projector.

But the Germans are convinced that this is an English word that they have borrowed.

It may give English speakers a warm glow to think that their language is prestigious in other countries, and that people even make up words according to English patterns. But there is a downside to the ubiquity of English, and that is the F word. I've heard this used in the middle of a German conversation by someone who was clearly German. In Danish the it even gets into the local TV police procedurals.

Again, these languages have their own swear words, and you might think that they wouldn't need ours too.

But swear words lose their power, and have to be replaced from time to time, or we would still be saying Zounds! Perhaps English will have the honour of providing the world's first universal swear word.

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