

# The influence of German on the English lexicon in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

JULIA SCHULTZ

An overview of the manifold subject areas and spheres of life enriched by German in the recent past

## Introduction

While there is a multitude of studies on the influence English has exerted on German, the converse language contact scenario has been comparatively neglected. German borrowings<sup>1</sup> which have recently been assumed into English have as yet received little attention in current research. The present paper intends to shed light on the impact of German on the English vocabulary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> The various German words and meanings taken over into English in the last few decades will be divided into manifold subject areas in order to give a rounded picture of the different domains and spheres of life enriched by German in the recent past.

The results presented in this investigation are based on a careful evaluation of the linguistic data provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. The *OED* is currently being subjected to its first entire overhaul. The electronic form of the *OED* is available online at <<http://www.oed.com>>, including the text of the Second Edition from 1989 (henceforth *OED2*), the volumes of the *OED Additions Series (OED ADD)* released in 1993 and 1997, and a considerable number of revised and new entries which will make up the Third Edition, or *OED3*. The linguistic evidence included in the *OED* is being updated every three months with the results of the revision work.<sup>3</sup> The electronic variant of the *OED* allows its users to perform a precise count and account of all the words and meanings which show a German etymon in their etymological descriptions.<sup>4</sup> With the following search option, the various 20<sup>th</sup> century German borrowings included in the *OED Online* can be identified: *Advanced*

*Search: Entries containing "German" in "Etymology" and "1900-" in "Date of Entry".* The corpus material which the present paper relies on was collected from the *OED* during the spring of 2015. At that time, the *OED* did not record any lexical item which had been borrowed from German in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The data retrieved from the *OED* encompassed several hundred 20<sup>th</sup> century borrowings assumed from Standard German, some borrowings from dialectal or regional German, as well as from further national varieties of German. The borrowing *rösti*, for instance, '[a] Swiss dish of grated potatoes, typically shaped into a small patty and fried' (*OED3*), entered English in 1906. Its source term *Rösti* is traditionally and mainly used in regional Swiss German. Furthermore, the sample included borrowings which were given a 'mixed' etymology in the *OED*, i.e. words which were partly taken over from German and partly from another language. All the various types of borrowings documented in the *OED* were considered in this study. The



*JULIA SCHULTZ studied English as well as French Language and Literature at the Universities of Heidelberg, Aberystwyth and Paris. She completed her PhD in Linguistics on 20<sup>th</sup> century borrowings from French into English at Heidelberg University. She currently teaches English and German Linguistics at the University of Heidelberg. E-mail: [Evajulia.Schultz@web.de](mailto:Evajulia.Schultz@web.de)*

borrowings under review were identified as assumed from German as the immediate donor language. Thus, *zimbel*, for example, specifying a musical instrument, was classified as a borrowing of German *Zimbel*, in spite of the fact that German had adopted it from Latin *cymbalum*.

As we shall see, the sample of German borrowings collected in this manner contains lexical items which have only been slightly assimilated to English. This holds for the noun *schuss*, for instance, a skiing term for '[a] straight, downhill run' (*OED2*), which is most commonly pronounced /ʃʊs/ in British and American English (see *OED2*, *OALD*, *LPD*; see appendix for all title abbreviations). Obviously, the pronunciation as well as the spelling of the word reflects its German origin. The sample of borrowings under consideration also includes lexical items which have been more anglicized, such as *combinatorics*, a particular domain of mathematics, which has been adapted from German *Kombinatorik*. The hybrid compound *mischmetal*, specifying any of a variety of alloys containing metal, serves as an additional example of a more assimilated borrowing. It constitutes a partial translation of German *Mischmetall*.

Let us now look at the various subject areas and fields of life enriched by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Subject areas and fields of life influenced by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

The number of 20<sup>th</sup> century German borrowings collected from the *OED Online* amounts to 1958 lexical items. The various borrowings were assigned to nine major subject fields and their sub-areas, in order to give an overview of the different domains from which German words and meanings were introduced into English in recent times. The division of a number of technical terms was in some cases due to the categorization in the *OED*. Yet the overall assignment of the German-derived words into several different subject fields is my own.

The following list provides the proportions of borrowings in ascending order in the various areas and spheres of life influenced by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For each domain, some representative examples of German borrowings are offered:

#### (1) Culture and History (28 borrowings, i.e. 1.4%)

- (1.1) Culturology and Cultural History (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *Völkerwanderung*, n. (1934); *Historikerstreit*, n. (1987).

- (1.2) Africa (6 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *piki-piki*, n. (1933); *Afrika Korps*, n. phr.<sup>5</sup> (1941).
- (1.3) Archaeology (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *Bandkeramik*, n. (1921).
- (1.4) Anthropology (10 borrowings, i.e. 0.5%), e.g. *Neanderthaler*, n. (1913).

#### (2) Leisure and Pleasure (31 borrowings, i.e. 1.6%)

- (2.1) Games (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *Zugzwang*, n. (1904); *kegler*, n. (1932).
- (2.2) Entertainment and Leisure Activities (9 borrowings, i.e. 0.5%), e.g. *bummel*, v. (1900); *Oktoberfest*, n. (1929).
- (2.3) Sports (17 borrowings, i.e. 0.9%), e.g. *abseil*, v. (1908); *Pilates*, n. (1934); *schuss*, n. (1937).

#### (3) Science and Technology (54 borrowings, i.e. 2.8%)

- (3.1) Nautics and Aeronautics (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *Parseval*, n. (1909); *snorkel/schnorkel*, n. (1944).
- (3.2) Photography (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *Rolleiflex*, n. (1930).
- (3.3) Electronics, Telecommunications and Computing (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *raster*, n. (1934); *Petri net*, n. phr. (1968).
- (3.4) Astronomy and Astronautics (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *Spörer*, n. (1922); *neutronium*, n. (1930).
- (3.5) Metallurgy (9 borrowings, i.e. 0.5%), e.g. *mischmetal*, n. (1915).
- (3.6) Manufacturing, Machinery and Electrical Engineering (25 borrowings, i.e. 1.3%), e.g. *litzendraht*, n. (1921); *photocathode*, n. (1930).

#### (4) Gastronomy (67 borrowings, i.e. 3.4%)

- (4.1) Restaurants and Bars (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *bierstube*, n. (1909); *Nachtklokal*, n. (1939).
- (4.2) Drink (3 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *goldwasser*, n. (1920).
- (4.2.1) Beer and Brewing (6 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *Pils*, n. (1957), *Eisbock*, n. (1977).
- (4.2.2) Wine (14 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *trockenbeerenauslese*, n. (1963); *Qualitätswein*, n. (1971).
- (4.3) Cookery (37 borrowings, i.e. 1.9%), e.g. *rollmop*, n. (1901); *prosit*, int. (1914); *rösti*, n. (1906); *Bratwurst*, n. (1911); *Spätzle*, n. (1933).

**(5) The Fine Arts and Crafts (76 borrowings, i.e. 3.9%)**

- (5.1) Architecture (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *Bauhaus*, n. (1923); *Jugendstil*, n. (1928).
- (5.2) Typography, Printing and Engraving (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *Fraktur*, n. (1904), *Schwabacher*, n. (1922).
- (5.3) Literature (15 borrowings, i.e. 0.8%), e.g. *Bildungsroman*, n. (1910); *Weltliteratur*, n. (1913); *Verfremdungseffekt*, n. (1951).
- (5.4) Art (16 borrowings, i.e. 0.8%), e.g. *malerisch*, adj. (1933); *Gesamtkunstwerk*, n. (1939).
- (5.4.1) Glass Art and Pottery (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *milchglas*, n. (1907); *hausmalerei*, n. (1935).
- (5.5) Music (31 borrowings, i.e. 1.6%), e.g. *zimbel*, n. (1910); *Sprechgesang*, n. (1925); *zugtrompete*, n. (1959).

**(6) People and Everyday Life (92 borrowings, i.e. 4.7%)**

- (6.1) Monetary Units (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *Westmark*, n. (1947); *Ostmark*, n. (1948); *Deutsche Mark*, n. phr. (1948).
- (6.2) Clothing (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *dirndl*, n. (1937); *lederhosen*, n. (1937).
- (6.3) Transport and Travelling (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *Rheingold*, n. (1928); *autobahn*, n. (1934).
- (6.4) Animal Rearing, Agriculture, Forestry and Horticulture (14 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *Rueping*, n. (1904); *Rottweiler*, n. (1912); *agrochemical*, adj. (1920).
- (6.5) Society, Human Behaviour, Characteristics and Feelings (60 borrowings, i.e. 3.1%), e.g. *Galgenhumor/galgenhumor*, n. (1912); *angst*, n. (1944); *rumspringa*, n. (1963); *Ossi*, n. (1989); *Wessi*, n. (1990).

**(7) Mathematics and The Humanities (127 borrowings, i.e. 6.5%)**

- (7.1) Theology and Religion (14 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *Miaphysite*, adj. (1992).
- (7.2) Philosophy (26 borrowings, i.e. 1.3%), e.g. *Übermensch*, n. (1902); *existentialism*, n. (1919).
- (7.2.1) Logic (8 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *Entscheidungsproblem*, n. (1930).
- (7.3) Mathematics (31 borrowings, i.e. 1.6%), e.g. *extremum*, n. (1904); *combinatorics*, n. (1941); *min-max*, n. (1944).
- (7.4) Language and Linguistics (48 borrowings, i.e. 2.5%), e.g. *Sprachgefühl*, n. (1902);

*Schallanalyse*, n. (1930); *Sprachbund*, n. (1943).

**(8) Civilization and Politics (162 borrowings, i.e. 8.3%)**

- (8.1) Educational System and Academics (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *doctorand*, n. (1912); *Abitur*, n. (1918).
- (8.2) Social Sciences and Sociology (12 borrowings, i.e. 0.6%), e.g. *wertfrei*, adj. (1909); *routinization*, n. (adopting a meaning from German in 1942).
- (8.3) Police, Espionage, Criminalistics and Law (11 borrowings, i.e. 0.6%), e.g. *criminalistics*, n. (1910); *Rechtsstaat*, n. (1912); *Vopo*, n. (1954).
- (8.4) Economy, Finances and Banking (12 borrowings, i.e. 0.6%), e.g. *Wirtschaftswunder*, n. (1938); *Euroclerosis*, n. (1984); *allfinanz*, n. (1988).
- (8.5) Politics (53 borrowings, i.e. 2.7%), e.g. *Weltpolitik*, n. (1903); *Third Reich*, n. phr. (1930); *Reichsführer*, n. (1933); *realo*, n. (1984).
- (8.6) War and the Military (70 borrowings, i.e. 3.6%), e.g. *flammenwerfer*, n. (1915); *Schutzstaffel*, n. (1930); *Blitzkrieg/blitzkrieg*, n. (1939); *Waffen SS*, n. phr. (1943); *Ritterkreuz*, n. (1940).

**(9) The Natural Sciences (1307 borrowings, i.e. 66.8%)**

- (9.1) Geography (2 borrowings, i.e. 0.1%), e.g. *rainforest*, n. (1903).
- (9.1.1) Cartography (2 borrowings, i.e. 0.1%), e.g. *Mollweide*, n. (1901).
- (9.2) Meteorology (6 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *radiosonde*, n. (1932).
- (9.3) Physical Geography and Geomorphology (13 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *polygonboden*, n. (1902); *inselberg*, n. (1907); *pseudokarst*, n. (1954).
- (9.4) Physics (59 borrowings, i.e. 3.0%), e.g. *relativization*, n. (1920); *bremsstrahlung*, n. (1944); *Umklapp*, n. (1951).
- (9.5) Mineralogy and Crystallography (78 borrowings, i.e. 4.0%), e.g. *koenenite*, n. (1902); *mineraloid*, n. (1913).
- (9.6) Geology (85 borrowings, i.e. 4.3%), e.g. *dreikanter*, n. (1903); *tonstein*, n. (1961).
- (9.6.1) Palaeontology (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *nema*, n. (1901); *lebensspur*, n. (1960).
- (9.7) Biology (102 borrowings, i.e. 5.2%), e.g. *Urschleim*, n. (1921); *provitamin*, n. (1927); *flimmer*, n. (1945).

- (9.7.1) Mycology (3 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *metula*, n. (1915).
- (9.7.2) Microbiology (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *bion*, n. (1938).
- (9.7.2.1) Bacteriology (3 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *corynebacterium*, n. (1909).
- (9.7.3) Genetics (25 borrowings, i.e. 1.3%), e.g. *genome*, n. (1926); *plasmon*, n. (1932).
- (9.7.4) Ecology (32 borrowings, i.e. 1.6%), e.g. *Waldsterben*, n. (1983).
- (9.7.5) Cell Biology and Cytology (41 borrowings, i.e. 2.1%), e.g. *agamete*, n. (1910); *euploid*, adj. (1926).
- (9.7.6) Botany (47 borrowings, i.e. 2.4%), e.g. *einkorn*, n. (1904); *krumholz*, n. (1908).
- (9.7.7) Zoology (55 borrowings, i.e. 2.8%), e.g. *waldrapp*, n. (1924); *Zugunruhe*, n. (1950); *flehmen*, n. (1970).
- (9.7.7.1) Entomology (13 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *bombykol*, n. (1961).
- (9.8) Medicine (182 borrowings, i.e. 9.3%), e.g. *autolysis*, n. (1900); *mneme*, n. (1913); *zeitgeber*, n. (1964).
- (9.8.1) Embryology (5 borrowings, i.e. 0.3%), e.g. *mesentoderm*, n. (1921).
- (9.8.2) Veterinary Medicine (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *myxomatosis*, n. (1927).
- (9.8.3) Surgery (7 borrowings, i.e. 0.4%), e.g. *pneumolysis*, n. (1913).
- (9.8.4) Immunology (11 borrowings, i.e. 0.6%), e.g. *reagin*, n. (1911).
- (9.8.5) Histology (13 borrowings, i.e. 0.7%), e.g. *osteon*, n. (1928).
- (9.8.6) Ophthalmology (16 borrowings, i.e. 0.8%), e.g. *deuteranomali*, n. (1915).
- (9.8.7) Anatomy (18 borrowings, i.e. 0.9%), e.g. *mesangium*, n. (1934).
- (9.8.8) Pharmacy and Pharmacology (37 borrowings, i.e. 1.9%), e.g. *morphinan*, n. (1949); *milbemycin*, n. (1975).
- (9.8.9) Psychology and Psychiatry (67 borrowings, i.e. 3.4%), e.g. *Gestalt-psychologie*, n. (1925); *schizoid*, adj. and n. (1925).
- (9.8.9.1) Spiritualism and Parapsychology (4 borrowings, i.e. 0.2%), e.g. *metagnome*, n. (1933).
- (9.9) Chemistry (197 borrowings, i.e. 10.1%), e.g. *pH*, n. (1909); *mutase*, n. (1914).
- (9.9.1) Physical Chemistry (32 borrowings, i.e. 1.6%), e.g. *solidus*, n. (1901).
- (9.9.2) Biochemistry (134 borrowings, i.e. 6.8%), e.g. *genin*, n. (1915); *muscimol*, n. (1967).

Of the 20<sup>th</sup> century German borrowings included in the *OED*, 14 lexical items (i.e. 0.7%) cannot

be clearly assigned to a specific subject area. An example is *Weltbild*, which translates as ‘view of life’. The word was assumed from German in 1934.

As is apparent, the smallest group of words borrowed from German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is related to the fields of culture and history. *Historikerstreit* may be adduced as an example. It was taken over from German in 1987 as a term for ‘[a] controversial scholarly debate in West Germany in 1986–7 as to the interpretation and significance of the Holocaust, and in particular whether the atrocities committed by the Nazis can be compared to those of the Stalinist regime’ (*OED3*).<sup>6</sup> This subject field also comprises a geographical area (i.e. the field of ‘Africa’) since some recent German borrowings have to do with the culture and history of this continent. This is partly due to the fact that some German researchers travelled to Africa especially in the earlier decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to do field work there. They coined or assumed new words to fill semantic gaps experienced in this oversea context, some of which also found their way into the English language. *Pikipiki*, for instance, denotes a type of whistle played by the Mbuti population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Its German source *Pikipiki* ultimately goes back to *Lese*, an African language. A careful perusal of the linguistic documentary evidence available in *OED3* reveals that the borrowing is first attested in English in a translated work written by the German ethnologist Paul Schebesta, who came to Africa in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century to study African people, their culture and customs:

1933 G. Griffin tr. P. Schebesta *Among Congo Pygmies* iii. 78 The pikipiki is ... a kind of whistle, about the thickness of a man’s finger, and is cut out of a round piece of wood. In both ends holes are ... burned, with a red-hot spike. It can then be used as a whistle like a hollow key. (*OED3*)

The word is quite often used attributively in English, as in *pikipiki whistle*. From *OED3* it becomes clear that the item entered the English language via Schebesta’s work. Some of the borrowings in the various subgroups relating to culture and history are specialized terms, as for instance *Bandkeramik*, which serves as an example from archaeology, designating a type of pottery characteristic of a neolithic culture. A further example is the borrowing *Neanderthaler*, ‘[a] Neanderthal hominid’ (*OED3*), which falls into the field of anthropology.

Similarly, the area ‘leisure and pleasure’ contains a comparatively small proportion of borrowings. It encompasses adopted words and meanings in ‘games’, ‘entertainment and leisure activities’, ‘sports’. Examples are *kegler*, *to bummel* and *Pilates*. Of these, *kegler*, ‘[o]ne who plays tenpin bowling, skittles, ninepins, etc.’ (*OED2*), is according to the *OED* confined to North American English. It corresponds to German *Kegler* ‘skittle-player’. The verb *to bummel* means, just like its German associate, ‘[t]o stroll or wander in a leisurely fashion’ (*OED2*), and *Pilates* is a comparatively common term for a combination of physical exercises with specific equipment which was developed by the German-born fitness trainer Joseph Hubertus *Pilates*.

Several of the borrowings which were introduced into English in the recent past belong to the ‘modern’ domains of science and technology with their related areas. Scientific and technical progress and inventions may have resulted in the formation of new words in these fields, a number of which entered the English language in the last few decades. Examples are the German borrowings *litzendraht*, a technical term in electronics for a ‘[I]itz wire’ (*OED2*), *Rolleiflex*, a proprietary name for any of a type of camera produced by the Rollei company, and the hybrid phrase *Petri net*, a variety of graph which is used in mathematics and computing. The latter reflects the name of the German mathematician Carl Adam *Petri*, who devised the concept in the 1960s.

In addition, German has served as a source of borrowings in the field of gastronomy, including lexical items associated with restaurants and bars, drink, beer and brewing, wine and cookery. *Bierstube*, *goldwasser*, *Pils*, *Qualitätswein*, *prosit*, *Bratwurst* and *Spätzle* can be adduced as examples. *Bierstube* refers to ‘[a] German tavern, taproom or bar’ (*OED2*), and *goldwasser*, literally ‘gold water’, is the name of a variety of liqueur traditionally made of several different herbs and spices, aniseed, cinnamon and tiny pieces of gold leaf. German beer has enjoyed popularity for centuries, so it is not surprising that German has enriched English with words from this field in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Pils*, for instance, is a relatively widespread term for a type of beer. We also find a number of wine terms among the *OED* entries, such as *Qualitätswein*, literally ‘quality wine’, which relates to a wine of superior quality in Germany or Austria. The interjection *prosit* is an additional 20<sup>th</sup> century borrowing. It is typically used as a toast, either at mealtimes or, occasionally, to wish good health to somebody who has sneezed. The word quite frequently occurs in German-speaking

contexts, as is illustrated by the following *OED3* examples:

1916 J. Buchan *Greenmantle* iii. 40 He filled us two long tankards of very good Munich beer. ‘*Prosit*,’ he said, raising his glass.

1973 J. P. Wilson & W. B. Michaels tr. M. Bar-Zohar *Third Truth* v. 73 Schneider said ‘*Prosit*,’ and lifted his glass.

*Bratwurst* and *Spätzle* specify dishes. The former constitutes a comparatively common term for a variety of German sausage, and the latter is used to designate ‘[n]oodles of a type made in southern Germany’ (*OED2*).

Further areas enriched by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the fine arts and crafts. Borrowings in these fields comprise *Jugendstil*, the German counterpart of *art nouveau*, a style of art developed in the later decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and *Fraktur*, a German black-letter type-face. Additional examples are the noun *Bildungsroman*, a variety of German novel, and the adjectival borrowing *malerisch*, ‘[o]f or relating to a manner of painting characterized more by the merging of colours than by the more formal linear style; painterly’ (*OED3*). Germany has also long been internationally renowned for its music, so it is no surprise to find that German has contributed words to this domain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Examples are *zugtrompete*, a type of trumpet, and *Sprechgesang*, ‘[a] style of dramatic vocalization intermediate between speech and song’ (*OED2*).

The field of people and everyday life consists of six subareas, comprising German borrowings associated with monetary units (e.g. *Deutsche Mark*), clothing (e.g. *dirndl*, quite a frequent term for ‘[a] style of woman’s dress imitating Alpine peasant costume with bodice and full skirt’ (*OED2*)), animal rearing, agriculture, forestry and horticulture (e.g. *Rottweiler*, a breed of dog, and *Rueping*, a method for the preservation of wood). In addition, it contains a substantial number of borrowings relating to society, human behaviour, characteristics and feelings, for example *rum-springa*, a borrowing from Pennsylvania German, which is used in the context of Amish communities to designate ‘a period of adolescence in which boys and girls are given greater personal freedom and allowed to begin courting’ (*OED3*). Its source term reflects a nominal use of *rum-springa* ‘to run around’, a specific application of the verb *herum-springen* in the sense of ‘to run around’ (see also *OED3*) in regional German. Further examples from this group of borrowings are *Galgenhumor*

'gallows-humour', the common term *angst*, as well as *Wessi* and *Ossi*, which have been used since the fall of the Berlin Wall in Germany in 1989 for 'a West German' (1997 *OED ADD Series*) and 'an East German' (*OED3*).

The number of borrowings in the field of mathematics and the humanities points to the fact that German may be regarded as a language of academic scholarship. It contains borrowings in theology and religion, philosophy, logic, mathematics, language and linguistics. It should be noted that the impact of German on these areas extends over a comparatively long time span. The adjective *Miaphysite*, for instance, a term in church history, is one of the latest borrowings recorded in the *OED*. It was adopted from German *miaphysitisch* in 1992, 'relating to the doctrine that in the person of Jesus there is either a single divine nature, or one inseparable nature, partly divine, and partly (subordinately) human' (*OED3*). The item may also be used to designate 'a Church professing this doctrine, or a person belonging to such a Church' (*OED3*). The borrowing *existentialism* is an example from the domain of philosophy. Just like its German source *Existentialismus*, the word specifies a philosophical doctrine. The direct loan *Entscheidungsproblem* refers to a decision problem in both logic and mathematics, and *Schallanalyse*, literally 'sound analysis', serves as an example from the field of language and linguistics. The latter mainly occurs in specialized, philological studies, as in the following example:

1931 *Year's Work Mod. Lang. Studies* I. iii. 126  
Siever's 'Schallanalyse' ... is a method of restoring the accentuation of a given textual record by registering and analyzing the reaction of a trained observer, who responds instinctively and directly to the psychological compulsion exerted by the text on any one who reads it aloud. (*OED2*)

'Civilization and politics' represents the second largest area enriched by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the borrowings from this field are related to politics, war and the military. These types of lexical item illustrate how greatly political developments and martial conflicts can leave their traces in a language. The borrowings which have to do with the *Third Reich* and the war of 1939–45 make up a significant proportion of the words which were taken over from German in the past few decades. *Reichsführer*, *Schutzstaffel* and *Waffen SS*, for instance, constitute some of the linguistic remnants which remind us of the terror of the Nazi regime in

Germany from 1933 to 1945. Of these, *Reichsführer* is now a historical and rare term for the title adopted by Adolf Hitler as leader of the German *Reich*. It may also serve as a historical term especially for Heinrich Himmler, the head of the *Schutzstaffel*, i.e. of the security force of the Nazis. The word is more usually referred to by its initials *SS*. The phrase *Waffen SS* denotes the armed forces of the *SS* during the Second World War. There is also *realo*, an example of a comparatively recent borrowing in the field of politics. The item was assumed from German in 1984, and it is originally and chiefly used to designate 'a member of the pragmatic or more moderate wing of the Green Party' (*OED3*) in Germany. Furthermore, the word came to refer to 'a moderate or pragmatic environmentalist' (*OED3*) in present-day English.

As becomes clear from the above list, the natural sciences with their different subgroups represent the field on which the influence of German was by far strongest in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: nearly 70 per cent of the lexical items taken over from German in the recent past belong to this area. The massive influx of natural science terms indicates how influential German research has been in international science in the recent past. The highest amount of borrowings in the natural sciences can be identified in biology, medicine and chemistry. A significant number of the natural science terms assumed from German in the past few decades are highly specialized, technical terms (such as *deuteranomal*, which denotes an individual suffering from a variety of colour blindness, and *corynebacterium*, which refers to a type of bacterium the genus name of which was coined in German) that the average native speaker of English is usually not familiar with. Yet we also find at least some words among the natural science terms which are relatively common in present-day English. *Rainforest*, for instance, represents a loan translation of German *Regenwald*.

## Conclusion

This article has carried out an exhaustive search of the *OED*, which may be considered a treasure-house of the English language, in order to offer a comprehensive account of the manifold areas and spheres of life influenced by German in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, the vocabulary assimilated into English from German in the recent past is characterized by its richness and diversity, and ranges from words which describe a variety

of aspects of everyday life to highly specialized, technical terms that the average speaker of English does normally not encounter.

### Notes

- 1 *Borrowing* represents the common term for a word or a meaning taken over from another language. It can also denote the process by which new linguistic material (i.e. a word or a meaning) is borrowed from a foreign language.
- 2 For a comprehensive analysis of the German impact on the English vocabulary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Schultz (forthcoming).
- 3 For details on the *OED* revision work see Durkin (1999: 1–49).
- 4 For more information on the compilation and the advantages of an electronic *OED* see Brewer (2004: 1–43) and Brewer (2007: 213–57).
- 5 The grammatical terminology used in this study is based on Quirk et al.'s *Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (2008). For the definition and understanding of the term *phrase* see Quirk (2008: 2.3ff and 2.25ff).
- 6 For the meanings of further unfamiliar borrowings see the corresponding definitions given in the *OED*.

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- The various editions of the *OED* are searchable online at <<http://www.oed.com/>>.

### Appendix

In this study, the following abbreviations are employed:

/.../	phonological transcription
'...'	meaning
adj.	adjective
int.	interjection
n.	noun
phr.	phrase
v.	verb
<i>LPD</i>	<i>Longman Pronunciation Dictionary</i> , Second Edition
<i>OALD</i>	<i>The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary</i> , Ninth Edition
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>OED2</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , Second Edition
<i>OED3</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> , Third Edition
<i>OED ADD Series</i>	<i>OED Additions Series</i>