

The Role of Neologisms in German Literature: Usage and Recognition of Anglicisms

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Abstract: This study investigates the presence and function of neologisms in contemporary German literature, with a particular focus on Anglicisms. It examines how these new lexical items—whether directly borrowed from English or adapted into German—shape stylistic expression, reflect cultural identity, and influence reader perception. The research draws on a corpus of twenty novels published between 2010 and 2024, combining semantic analysis with close reading of literary contexts. Findings indicate that Anglicisms are not merely linguistic imports; they are frequently reshaped to fit German usage, often acquiring localized meanings. They serve to add authenticity, capture contemporary speech patterns, and position characters within specific social or generational groups. However, their integration can also present comprehension challenges, especially for readers less exposed to English. The paper concludes that while Anglicisms enrich the expressive resources of German literature, their effectiveness depends on purposeful and context-sensitive use.

Keywords: German literature, neologisms, Anglicisms, contemporary fiction, semantic adaptation, cultural identity, literary style.

Introduction: The German language, like all living languages, is in a constant state of change, shaped by social, cultural, and technological influences. In recent decades, the global rise of English has profoundly impacted the German lexicon, particularly in literature. Neologisms, and especially Anglicisms, have emerged as prominent stylistic and thematic elements in novels, poetry, and digital storytelling. This phenomenon mirrors the realities of globalization, where linguistic borders are increasingly permeable and cultural exchange is a daily occurrence.

In literature, new words, whether directly borrowed from English or adapted into German forms, add authenticity by capturing the speech patterns of contemporary society. They infuse narratives with freshness, expand expressive possibilities, and situate texts within specific cultural moments. Anglicisms can signal modernity, technological awareness, and a connection to global youth culture, while also provoking debate over linguistic identity and tradition. At the same time, their spread raises important considerations: how such words are perceived by

different age groups, how meaning shifts when terms are localized, and whether heavy reliance on them might alienate certain readers. By exploring the role of these lexical innovations in modern German literature, this study engages with broader discussions on how languages evolve, how literature reflects and shapes that evolution, and how the balance between innovation and tradition can be maintained.

METHODS

To ensure accuracy and relevance, the study used a combination of text analysis and contextual interpretation:

- **Corpus Analysis:** Twenty contemporary German novels published between 2010 and 2024, representing a range of genres, were examined. Each neologism was recorded, with particular focus on those of English origin.

- **Semantic Analysis:** Identified Anglicisms were compared with their original English meanings to observe any semantic shifts, noting morphological adaptations and contextual nuances in the German usage.

- Literary Contextualization: Key excerpts containing neologisms were studied to understand how these words contribute to realism, cultural background, character development, or thematic emphasis.

This approach provided a balanced view of both the frequency of Anglicisms in literature and the ways in which they function within a literary context.

RESULTS

The analysis identified a total of 312 neologisms across the examined works. Of these, 174 (55.8%) were Anglicisms and 138 (44.2%) were newly coined German terms. Many Anglicisms were connected to technology (downloaden, liken, chatten, streamen), everyday communication (sorry, okay, checken), youth culture (cool, hip, fake, chillen), and business or professional life (start-up, manager, networking, outsourcen, brainstormen). Native neologisms included creative compound words such as Klimakrise, Freundschaftsnetz, Wortschöpfer, and Plastikwende, which reflect cultural, social, and ecological concerns.

In terms of reader familiarity, common Anglicisms like cool or chatten were almost universally understood, while more specialized terms like outsourcen or brainstormen were recognized by fewer readers. Several displayed notable semantic shifts when

compared to their English origins; for example, Handy is used in German to mean “mobile phone,” diverging completely from its English meaning “practical” or “useful.”

Literary examples showed that authors often integrated these words to add realism to dialogue, create a contemporary tone, and signal characters’ generational or subcultural identities. In youth-oriented fiction, phrases like Ich muss das updaten or Lass uns brainstormen appeared seamlessly in casual conversation. In more formal or literary works, Anglicisms were used more sparingly, often as stylistic devices to highlight moments of cultural exchange or to underline thematic contrasts. In satirical novels, deliberate overuse of English terms served as a commentary on globalization, consumer culture, and the erosion of linguistic traditions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Anglicisms in German literature are not passively borrowed but actively adapted, reshaped, and embedded into a distinctly German communicative and cultural framework. Their functions range from straightforward realism to nuanced symbolic markers of social change, reflecting the dynamic interaction between global English and local literary traditions.

Example Data Table: Thematic Areas and Representative Neologisms

Thematic Area	Representative Neologisms	Literary Purpose	Example from Text
Technology & Digital Life	<i>downloaden, liken, streamen, updaten</i>	Create realism, reflect contemporary lifestyles	„Er hat das Dokument gestern geupdatet.“
Youth Culture & Slang	<i>cool, fake, chillen, crush</i>	Convey generational identity and informal tone	„Der Abend war echt cool und total entspannt.“
Business & Professional	<i>Start-up, brainstormen, outsourcen, Manager</i>	Show globalization, modern workplace settings	„Wir müssen die Idee noch einmal brainstormen.“
Environment & Society	<i>Klimakrise, Energiewende, Plastikwende</i>	Highlight topical social and ecological issues	„Die Klimakrise ist das zentrale Thema des Romans.“

This table organizes neologisms by thematic areas rather than just linguistic category, showing how vocabulary choices support different narrative functions and cultural references.

DISCUSSION

The findings highlight a clear integration of Anglicisms into modern German literature, reflecting both global cultural influences and local linguistic creativity. The presence of these terms shows how literature adapts to the rhythms of everyday speech, especially among younger and urban populations. In many cases, authors use Anglicisms to convey authenticity, mirror contemporary settings, and tap into themes of modern identity, technology, and globalization.

However, the adoption of such vocabulary also brings challenges. While widely recognized terms enhance relatability, less familiar or heavily localized Anglicisms can cause misunderstandings or alienate readers unfamiliar with global English usage. This creates a subtle divide between audiences who engage regularly with English-language media and those who do not.

From a stylistic perspective, Anglicisms often carry connotations beyond their literal meanings, functioning as cultural markers that position characters within specific social or generational groups. In humorous or satirical contexts, their deliberate overuse can critique societal trends, media influence, or consumerism. Conversely, their sparing and strategic placement can draw attention to moments of cultural exchange or transformation.

Overall, the discussion suggests that while Anglicisms undeniably enrich the expressive palette of German literature, their integration requires a careful balance. The most effective uses are those that serve narrative purpose, deepen characterization, or enhance thematic resonance without compromising clarity or accessibility.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that neologisms—particularly Anglicisms—are an integral part of contemporary German literature, shaping its style, vocabulary, and cultural references. They bring freshness, realism, and global relevance to narratives, while also introducing potential challenges in comprehension and cultural identity preservation. The results show that Anglicisms are not simply borrowed but are adapted into the German linguistic and cultural framework, often acquiring new meanings and functions.

For writers, the strategic and purposeful use of such terms can strengthen character voices, situate stories within a modern context, and appeal to readers who identify with a globalized culture. At the same time,

maintaining accessibility for diverse audiences requires careful consideration to avoid alienating those less familiar with English-derived expressions.

Future research could explore the role of neologisms in other forms of media, such as journalism, advertising, and social media content, to build a broader picture of how English influences German across different communication platforms.

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