

Verbessere dein Englisch! (1) Improve your English! (1)

Hint for English speaking readers: This article only deals with the correct translation of German text into the English language. If you do speak English very well, you doesn't have to read these lines. The Editor

Diese Hinweise sollen deutschsprachigen Autoren, die ihre Texte selbst übersetzen, auf Punkte aufmerksam machen, die die Übersetzung für native speakers (Muttersprachler) „more readable“, also lesbarer machen sollen. Übersetzungen mittels eines Wörterbuches treffen nicht immer ins Schwarze. Der Editor

Translation Pitfalls: German to English

Examples from some "Bulletin" Articles
by **Harald Johnson, Bulletin Translator**

Quite a few of our German authors try their hand at translating their mother tongue to a language not really their own, a language they learnt second-hand at school.

I can understand their motives, but it can't always be pulled off.

Why not?

There are quite a few reasons. Primarily, a one-to-one translation just doesn't always work. The individual words can each have quite a few different meanings depending on the context and other factors. Then there is the question of register---formal, not so formal, slang and so on. And what formulation is expected?

A native speaker knows this instinctively. Foreigners usually don't.

A few examples picked at random:

A) Word order / Stiltedness

The translation:

"Who was in the mood could afterwards pollute the air with particulate matter."

(Original: "Wer wollte, der konnte anschließend die Luft mit Feinstaub belasten.")

What's wrong with this?

1) **Word order** ("Who was in the mood") Very German! This kind of word order is for questions, not sentences.

My suggestion: If anybody wanted to set off fireworks, (If anybody was in the mood to set off fireworks) they could do so after the stroke of midnight/(or) ...they could do so after seeing in the New Year.

(Original, previous sentence):

"Viele Umarmungen und Händeschütteln, verbunden mit Neujahrsgrüßen, folgten darauf, und wir fühlten uns wie in einer großen Familie.")

2) "...die Luft mit Feinstaub belasten"

Overly complex---stilted. See my suggestion above.

B) Prepositions

The translation: "Nowadays, **at** the age of emancipation, a lady can of course ask a gentleman to dance."

(Original: "Heute im Zeitalter der Emanzipation...")

My suggestion: Nowadays, **in** the Age of Emancipation, (or- as we are all so emancipated)

The translation of prepositions often causes quite a few problems, as they too have several meanings and are often tied together with idioms (or prepositional phrases/prepositions of time/ of place):

Preposition of Time

What is a preposition of time?

A preposition of time is a **preposition** that allows you to discuss a specific time period such as a date on the calendar, one of the days of the week, or the actual time something takes place. Prepositions of time are the same words as prepositions of place, however they are used in a different way. You can easily distinguish these prepositions, as they always discuss times rather than places.

- **At** – This preposition of time is used to discuss clock times, holidays and festivals, and other very specific time frames including exceptions, such as "at night."
- **In** – This preposition of time is used to discuss months, seasons, years, centuries, general times of day, and longer periods of time such as "in the past."
- **On** – This preposition of time is used to discuss certain days of the week or portions of days of the week, specific dates, and special days such as "on New Year's Day."

Source: <https://www.gingersoftware.com/content/grammar-rules/preposition/preposition-time/>

Needless to say, these must be looked up and practised if you haven't mastered them yet.

What one shouldn't do, translate them literally, unless you are sure the usage is correct.

C) Inaccurateness (of meaning)

Example: "A MC (= Master of Ceremonies) ... takes the reports of the callers and cuers..."

Original: "...einen eigenen MC. Der nimmt dazu die Meldungen der Caller und Cuer..."

My suggestion: "...there is a MC... He takes the announcements of the callers etc."

Why announcements?

The definition of "report":

re·port (rĭ-pôrt')

n. 1. a. A formal account of the proceedings or transactions of a group: a company's annual report.

b. A spoken or written account of an event, usually presented in detail: a news report; reports of children getting food poisoning.

2. A person who is accountable or subordinate to another person within a company or organization: a manager with two reports.

3. reports Law Bound volumes containing the published court opinions in legal cases, intended to provide a reference for precedents in subsequent cases.

4.

a. Reputation; repute: We know him only by report.

b. *Archaic* Common talk; rumour or gossip.

5. An explosive noise: the report of a rifle.

Source: <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/report>

A report (used as a noun) is used for something that happened in the past or is happening now.

An announcement is used for future events: e.g.

"The caller announced that the lunch-break would be at 12 and not at 1."

To be continued...



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