

Annie-Way: *Annie-Way is the way Germans in the early 2000s (the Nullerjahre, as they would put it) pronounced anyway. As with almost all the best Denglisch terms, the way they used it was slightly, ever-so-slightly, wrong.*

Denglisch is Like Bindweed

Denglisch – I personally think the most annoying thing about Denglisch is not the way it crowds out and destroys Proper German like some kind of disgustingly destructively violently vandalistic *Unkraut* (Denglisch is like the grey, violent, American-style “squirrels” which invaded Britain after World War II and Proper German is like the sweet, innocent, totally cute, actually-look-like-squirrels-and not-bastard-rats-with-fluffy-tails-type squirrels which died out in Britain, but still, gorgeously, live here. Every time I see a cute orange squirrel I say to my son, darkly, all the squirrels I grew up with were ugly, I only saw this kind in books, look how cute it is.) Denglisch starves Proper German out. I once sat in *Tropical Islands* for two hours, trying desperately to remember what the Proper German for lifeguard was. In the end, I went to my locker, took out my phone, and googled it. (It’s *Bademeister*, or *Rettungsschwimmer*, by the way.) I once asked everyone in a hotel in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern what they said for *einchecken* and *auschecken* in the DDR. Honestly, the Denglisch terms take up the space in your brain where the Proper German should go, that was some serious Mandela Effect shit, yeah, like as if the aliens had been wiping everyone’s memories most effectively. A lot of people said, 100 per cent certain, “It was always *ein-* and *auschecken!*” But some people whispered vaguely: “I ... don’t ... know. It couldn’t have been *auschecken* ... could it? Could it? What did we used to say? We must have said something ... I think I knew it once.”

DENGLISCH literally KILLING the Proper German in your head is very, very, very annoying – but it’s not the most annoying thing.

The most annoying thing about Denglisch is, without a doubt, when Germans throw a Denglisch word into a German sentence for no reason whatsoever – and you have no idea if they are doing it especially for you because they know you are a native speaker, or if this is A New Thing People Say.

There’s a poetry slammer organiser who always says to me: “Du bist so *charming* auf der Bühne!” – have checked with others, this is just for me. It’s not A Thing. But how the fuck are you meant to know? “Das ist ja irgendwie doch super *niiiiiiice!*” THIS IS A THING. “I know, I know,” inexplicably plonked into the sentence: THIS IS ALSO A THING.

And *Annie-Way*? This isn’t, and don’t ask me why, a thing anymore. But it was for ages – right up until, like 2009, I’d say – and it was really fucking annoying. In the middle of a sentence, for no reason whatsofuckingever, out of nowhere, “*Annie-way!*”



Anmeldung: *Anmeldung means registration, and Abmeldung means deregistration. But Germans register for things more than English speakers do – you have to register with the library, register at the gym, register at the nursery. And they definitely deregister more. I feel like in other countries you can just stop doing something, and then it’s over, but in Germany you always have to abmelden. But one of the weirdest things about Germany is undoubtedly that everyone in the entire country has to anmelden with the government – and nobody seems to mind!*

Achtung, Achtung, Anmeldung, Anmeldung!

Germans love privacy and stuff, but weirdly don’t mind the government having a huge database of where everyone in the country lives.

“Are you still sleeping with that old boy? The one who didn’t know that Wales wasn’t part of England?” I ask my tiny friend Lola, who can sometimes have really bad taste in men, especially old men.

“Of course not!” she says, outraged. “I’ve been socially distancing! I’m only having casual sex with people I actually like!”

I nod.

It’s the first time I’ve seen her since the half-hearted German lockdown ended. We’re sitting by the Paul-Linke-Ufer and not sharing two separate bottles of cider. I keep thinking I see Prof. Dr. Christian Drosten walk past, so I smile. But it’s just a vaguely sexy, fairly sad German guy walking with a bike. I have to admit, it’s great to be out. I always thought I was a hermit, but after six weeks stuck inside, I actually truly enjoy going out again.

It’s a great feeling.

The constant, slight boredom – a constant, slight panic I wasn’t having fun and would rather be at home on Facebook – has disappeared. I now know I *do* want to go out sometimes.

“He really is old,” she says. “He’s an old man. He smells old. He feels old. He feels wrinkly. His waist seems like it has arthritis.”

“I was surprised by how old he was,” I say, diplomatically.

“You know how you notice how old he is?” she says. “He still says *polizeiliche Anmeldung*. Have you ever noticed that? Old people are always saying *polizeiliche Anmeldung*?”

“What?” I say.

“You never noticed? Old people think it’s called *polizeiliche Anmeldung*. I guess in the olden days – like in the sixties and stuff – you had to go and *anmelden* at the police station? You never noticed?”

I stare at Lola, horrified. I had, in fact, not noticed that. I had *very much not* noticed that. And I’ll tell you something else I hadn’t noticed. I had not noticed that young people don’t call it a *polizeiliche Anmeldung* anymore.

And I will tell you another thing I hadn’t noticed: that I am an old person now, my skin wrinkled, my vagina crumpled and crinkly like the pages of an old, dusty bible. My body is so old and ancient that when Germany’s top euthanasia-ist talks about letting old fogies die of Corona to reduce overpopulation, it is, basically, me she is talking about. I am old now and death is, quite literally, just around the corner.

I have been *anmelding* in Germany for twenty years. When I arrived, I was petrified of the idea. I thought it was, basically, Stasi as fuck. The police had a big database with the name and address of everyone in the fucking country? What? I channelled Kafka, registered myself and felt scared and petrified and horrified the whole time I was doing it.

I’ve got used to it now, though. This is what twenty years in Germany has done to me. I now often forget that you don’t need to register with the authorities in Britain. To be honest, a part of me, a tiny part of me, still thinks it’s weird and oppressive. Why are we slagging China or North Korea off? But 95 per cent of me thinks it’s pretty practical and useful. During that awful year after the Brexit referendum, when Polish teenagers were being asked to submit twenty years of electricity bills with their names on them or leave the country immediately, it seemed to me that the only possible solution would be to implement some kind of *Anmeldung* system. If you are going to be Stasi as fuck, at least do it right.

But what about all the white Germans who think the Corona app is creepy? Or that *Impfpflicht* is somehow a terrible human rights abuse? Or those weirdos who think it’s child abuse to put picture of your kid blowing out their birthday cake candles on Instagram? I don’t get it. If I was 100 per cent on board with *Anmeldung* – with being literally legally required to tell the *fucking government* where I lived – I wouldn’t care about my privacy in any other way. But I guess, despite twenty years here, I’ll never really be German.

Chapter Two:

B is for ...

Bäckerei versus Backshop: *Bäckerei is the German word for bakery, and it says something about British bakers that the first time I went to a Bäckerei in Germany, the German guy I was with told me that they didn't even bake the bread on the premises – and I thought for the first time in my life “Oh yeah, the word bakery must come from baking!”*

Backshops are cheapo Berlin-style bakers. I love them. German people in Berlin are always complaining that real bakeries are dying out and you can't get good bread anywhere and stuff like that. And I feel for them, I really do – but not enough to go to a real bakery.

Baking My Way Through Lockdown One

This is the kind of mother I would have liked to have been during the lockdown: calm, conscientious, relaxed, loving – and good at baking. Yes, good at baking – but not in a smug, smarmy sort of way, oh no. I wish I was good at baking in a sloppy, vegan, witchy, almost-but-not-quite lesbian kind of way. This is the kind of person, the kind of mother, I would like to have been.

The kind of mums who are good at baking in a smug way are sensible, practical people – good at baking, good at homeschooling, too. They baked scones, muffins, brownies, things like that. The kind of witchy women I admire fucked the homeschooling in the mouth with a broomstick and made weird, vegan stuff – Indian scones or zucchini muffins or gluten-free, 100 per cent kakao brownies. I despise people who bake in a middle-class, show-offy kind of a way, and want to be like people who bake weird vegan stuff. Oh, and sourdough bread! I think I admire people who bake

sourdough bread. I don't know what it is and can't be bothered to google, but I think if I knew what it was, I would want to bake some. A lot.

But this is the kind of mother I am, and this is how I bake during the Half-hearted German Lockdown: I scroll recipes on my phone for inspiration, recipes for scones, muffins and brownies. I look at the list of ingredients, and then half-heartedly scour my Corona-Hamster-Schrank for flour and baking powder. I don't bother weighing anything, and decide to use *Traubenzucker* instead of *Feinzucker*, and tell myself that if the thing we're baking comes out more like chocolate scones, we'll call them chocolate scones – that's a thing, right? – and if they come out more like muffins, we'll call them muffins, and nobody will be any the wiser.

"Maybe," I say to Baby Leo, my assistant baker, "we will have invented a new type of chocolate goodie, the scuffin."

"Wow!" he says wisely, and then runs to the kitchen wall and presses a chocolate hand against the whiteness, and makes a perfect handprint. My heart sinks when I see this and I look at the goo we have created, and remember baking powder.

"I forgot to put baking powder in!" I say to Baby Leo.

"Wow!" he says.

"No, it's bad," I say. "It's bad Mummy forgot."

"Oh no!" he whispers. "Oh dear!" I think he might be a TV presenter when he grows up, there's this gorgeous simplicity to his emotions which reminds me, kind of, of Holly Willoughby or the lady who's always on with Piers Morgan.

We put the chocolate blobs on a tin and push it in the oven.

"Wow!" Baby Leo says magnificently. I wash his hands clean and try to remove the choccie hand stain from the perfect white wall. I take him out onto the balcony.

Baby Leo starts playing dinosaurs and I scroll Facebook, feeling guilty for even having a balcony in the first place.

I watch a boy I know gingerly removing the crime scene tape the landlords put over the slide in our courtyard playground and have a sneaky, slide down. I don't blame the kids for sneaking onto the playground equipment, I don't blame parents for struggling. But it makes me mad that we could all bear to not go to playground when it was cold – but we can't avoid the playground for a few months to save people's lives?

The timer on my phone goes off.

"I think our muffins are ready," I say to Baby Leo. "Or scones. We'll see what they most look like. Maybe scuffins. Maybe we'll have invented a new type of food. Maybe I'll get rich. And we can move to Potsdam!"

I pull the tray out of the oven and the scuffins I have baked are pretty much inedible. Maybe I should tell everyone they're rock cakes, I say to myself. No, even if chocolate rock cakes were a thing, these are disgusting.

Baby Leo bites into one and announces, cheerfully: "AUWA!"

"They're not very yummy, are they?" I say.

"Cookies. Is. Nicht. Yummy. Cookies. Is. Auwa. Meine. Mouth."

"I know exactly what you mean," I say. I'll wait for them to cool down and throw them on the compost heap, I think. And then we'll put a bit of telly on. This lockdown. It won't