



Words and Traditions

Cultural exchange through words and traditions brings richness to our vocabulary and our lives.

German words used in English

Angst

Dachshund

Doppelgänger

Ersatz

Gesundheit

Iceberg (*Eisberg*)

Kaput

Kindergarten

Leitmotif

Poltergeist

Sauerkraut

Schadenfreude

Uber (über)

Wanderlust

Weltschmerz

Wunderkind

Zeitgeist

English words that have been Germanized (eingedeutsch)

Handy

To Germans, it means “cell phone”. Handy, the English word, does in fact have an English origin. It comes from Motorola’s Handie-Talkie from the 1940s, which American GIs carried in Germany during World War II.

Shooting

To Germans, it means a photoshoot. Don’t worry, no guns involved!

Oldtimer

Germans say this word when referring to an old car, not an older person, as English speakers do.

Beamer

When English speakers hear this word, their minds typically go to a BMW car. For Germans, it simply means projector, no correlation to their beloved car brand.

Mobbing

Germans use this word to mean “bullying”.

German Christmas Traditions in America

While Christmas did not originate in Germany, many of the traditions surrounding the holiday did and have forever changed how Americans celebrate.

Legend has it that **candy canes** originated in Germany in 1670 and were brought to the U.S. in 1847 by a German-Swedish Immigrant. By 1950, they were being mass produced and can still be found on Christmas trees and in the hands of children to this day.

Early versions of **Advent calendars** started in Germany in 1903 by publisher Gerhard Land. These calendars offered children a way to count down to Christmas by opening one “door” or “window” a day to reveal a Bible passage, poem, or small gift. Today they are sold all around the U.S. with varying gifts inside.

Decorating Christmas trees is a German tradition that dates back to the Middle Ages. It was popularized in the U.S. in the early 19th century by German immigrants. The love for the Christmas tree is even seen in the classic German Christmas carol, “*O Tannenbaum*” (“Oh, Christmas Tree!”), which was written in 1824 by a Leipzig organist named Ernst Anschütz.

“**Silent Night**” (*Stille Nacht*) was penned by an Austrian pastor Joseph Franz Mohr on Christmas Eve in 1818. His friend, the choir master and organist for Mohr’s church, Franz Xaver Gruber, put a melody to the poem with his guitar. To this day, “*Stille Nacht*” is considered a national treasure. While you may hear it often in grocery stores, malls and in commercials in the U.S., in Austria, the song is traditionally not allowed to be publicly played before Christmas Eve.

The
Weihnachtsmarkt
is one of the
many German
Christmas
traditions that has
been adopted by
Americans.

Christmas Market on the market square of Goslar, Germany. Photo: iStock.com/Juergen Sack