11 Foreign Words and Phrases

Borrowing and phonetic adaptation

As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, English has always been a language open to enrichment from other languages. Much of the discussion in this book deals with words which, though not of Anglo-Saxon origin, are not treated as “foreign” by speakers of English. The classical vocabulary we have been analyzing has become assimilated into the language, and though some of the words may have been unfamiliar to you, their overall shape follows the patterns of English and does not bear the mark of foreignness.

The adaptation of borrowed vocabulary to the native patterns is a lengthy historical process. Having dealt with the morphemes and words introduced in the more distant past, we now turn to some more recent imports from various languages. The words we have included in this chapter here have achieved a measure of currency in English. Like all of the learned words discussed earlier in the book, many of these recent loans are a recognizable component of an educated person’s vocabulary and they can be encountered in non-specialized texts. On the other hand, many of these items are still identified with the language from which they were borrowed in orthography, pronunciation, or both. Many of the borrowings from non-classical languages are relatively new and their components, if any, have not become productive within English. We will therefore not attempt to parse these words systematically into familiar building blocks. Nevertheless, in some cases it will be useful to refer to the meanings of the components of a word or a phrase, either to help you memorize it, or to help you with the meaning of other words and phrases where the loan occurs.

Criteria for recognizing “foreign” words. It is difficult to define all the criteria which separate accepted and assimilated borrowings from what we call here “foreign” words and phrases. One good sign of foreignness is the preservation of original source orthography that is in some way distinct from the familiar spelling conventions in English. Seeing a word spelled with an accent mark, letters, or letter sequences such as <-ñ>, <-ka-, ko-, ku-, kh-, kl->, <-tz->, <-zz->, <-sch->, <-ieux->, etc.
immediately signals that there is something distinct about that word. Similarly, we are often aware that some sound, or sound sequence, in the pronunciation of a word is distinctly un-English. The French expression *déjà vu*, literally “already seen,” now used as a specialized psychological term (see our list below), is a good illustration of foreignness in both spelling and pronunciation. The Spanish *mañana* “tomorrow” or the Russian *kolkhoz* “cooperative farm” are also marked as foreign in both spelling and pronunciation.

Earlier in this book we introduced some phonetic symbols used in the International Phonetic Alphabet, the IPA, and we used those symbols throughout to transcribe the pronunciation of well-established lexical items in English. In what follows in this final chapter, we will depart from our IPA practice. Instead, we will transcribe the pronunciation of the foreign words in “imitation” English spelling. The reasons we are doing this just here, and not elsewhere are two. First, in introducing IPA symbols in Chapter 5, we restricted ourselves to symbols which are needed for the pronunciation of native English words. Therefore, if we wanted to represent the foreign pronunciations authentically, the IPA symbols that the reader will be familiar with would not be sufficient to cover the rich variety of foreign sounds that can be encountered in the donor languages. Second, the pronunciation of many of the words borrowed from living languages will vary in English depending on the familiarity of the speaker with the source language. In other words, there is no established “standard” pronunciation for many of these words. We mark stressed syllables with capital letters; the rest of the transcription should be transparent.

Odd spelling and pronunciation may not always be sufficient to mark a foreign word or phrase, however. Another possible criterion for “foreignness” is semantic novelty. Recently borrowed words cover notions that originate elsewhere; they often evoke associations with a specialized field, a particular culture, with social phenomena or customs outside the English-speaking world. The German *lederhosen*, the Yiddish *kosher*, the Spanish *corrida*, the Russian *perestroika*, and the Japanese *shogun* are words distinctly associated with the cultural and political outlook of the societies in which these languages are spoken as mother-tongues. By adopting these words in English, we enrich both our vocabulary and our knowledge of other people’s customs and views.

Most dictionaries mark the special status of unassimilated borrowings by printing them in italics. Similarly, style guidebooks stipulate, and publishers and editors expect, that such words and phrases should be italicized or in some way stand out on the printed page. As with the preceding vocabulary material in this book, the degree of familiarity and currency of these words and phrases will vary. Some may be
household words for some readers, others may be completely new. In selecting the entries, we have mostly followed our own intuitions as to what is still felt to be “alien.” If we pursue the legalistic metaphor, we could say that they all hold a legitimate work permit within English; some of them have achieved a permanent resident status, and some are first-generation citizens.

2 French

You will remember from Chapter 3 that about 45 percent of an educated English speaker’s vocabulary today is of French origin. The most numerous additions of French words to the English word stock came as a consequence of the Norman Conquest of 1066: more than ten thousand French words were borrowed into English during the Middle English period, the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries. Since then, French has continued to be an important source of new words and phrases in English. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, French was taken to be the principal language of culture and civilization. Because of that prestige, other European languages including English borrowed large numbers of words from French. Some of these earlier borrowings have been totally assimilated into English and may not trigger a sense of “foreignness”: communism (1843), chauvinism (1870), dossier (1880), blâché (1819), impasse (1851), clairvoyance (1847). This is true of many words borrowed through motoring and aviation early in the twentieth century: fuselage, garage, hangar, limousine. The word associated with the re-definition of ground transportation during the twentieth century, automobile, had been borrowed from French in 1865. Its shortened form, auto is first recorded in English in 1899; a measure of how soon and how thoroughly this word was felt to be a native word is the proliferation of compounds with auto- as their first element: autobus,Autocade, Autocar, Autocourt, automaker, automotive, automotor.

On the other hand, a fair number of French words and expressions exist in English which have not been fully adapted to the native pronunciation and spelling patterns. For most speakers, these phrases still have an air of “otherness” about them. They can be perceived as elegant and educated, and they are likely to show up in the writing of individuals who seek to give a special elevated touch to their work. They are sometimes heard in conversation, not infrequently coming from individuals seeking to establish their social and educational credentials, or savoir faire, “know how,” of sophisticated language use. The number of words and expressions one could list here is quite large; we are only offering a sample of the most common such expressions.
au jus oh ZHOO, oh JOO (the final -s is not pronounced in French; English speakers vary on this detail; the vowel is one which does not exist in English at all) – literally “with the gravy” – served in the meat’s natural juices.

au pair oh PEHR, literally “equal, even” – a person, usually foreign, employed to take care of children and housework in exchange for room and board.

bête noire bait NWAR “black beast,” means aversion, pet aversion, something dreaded or detested = bugbear < Welsh – originally hobgoblin “bugbear, bogey” – collective for a creepy, crawly form of life.

coup de grâce koo de GRAS “stroke of mercy.” A death blow or shot administered to the mortally wounded, a decisive finishing blow or event, originally the blow with which a knight dispatched his fallen opponent. Other coup, or “blows” are: coup d’état: “stroke of state,” takeover, coup de force “a sudden violent action,” coup de maître: masterstroke, masterpiece.

déjà vu de-zhah VOO, also de-zhah VYOU “already seen,” the illusion of remembering scenes and events even though they are actually being experienced for the first time. The medical term is paramnesia [para “beyond, beside” +a+mn+es+ia] “memory disorder, beyond remembering.” Recently the phrase has extended its meaning to anything that is blandly and unexcitingly familiar, a repetition.

enfant terrible an-fan te-REEBL “terrible child,” originally, “a wild and destructive child,” now: an excessively brash and outspoken member of a group whose failure to conform may be a source of embarrassment to the group.

faute de mieux foht de MYUR “for lack of anything better,” cf. also tant mieux “so much the better.” Most commonly used abstractly, as in “for lack of a better alternative,” “for lack of a better argument.”

gaucherie gohsh-REE “left-iness,” – i.e., as if done with the left hand, a tactless or awkward act, crudeness, lack of social experience, gracelessness.

idée fixe ee-day FEEKS “fixed idea,” generally an obsession.

joie de vivre zhwah duh VEEVR “joy of living,” an optimistic disposition based on the sense that it’s a joy to be living.

laissez faire les-say FEHR “let do,” doctrine that the government should regulate as little as possible, especially in respect to business and industry, a policy of non-interference, letting things drift without direction or planning. The expression comes from the teachings of eighteenth century French economists who advocated that the people should be allowed to do as they wished.

néé NEY “born,” usually added to a married woman’s name to refer to her maiden name if the two names are different. The masculine form, used after pseudonyms, is né.
noblesse oblige  *noh-BLESS oh-BLEEZH*  “nobility obligates”: the obligation of honorable, generous, and responsible behavior and actions associated with high rank or birth.

nouvelle cuisine  *noovel kweeZEEN*  “new cooking,” a combination of healthy food preparation which underscores the natural taste of the ingredients, the artistic presentation of the food on the plate, and the small-to-moderate quantity of the food.

parti pris  *par-tee PREE*  “side taken,” preconceived opinion, prejudice, bias.

pot pourri  *poh poo-REE*  “rotten pot” – a mixture of flowers, herbs, and spices usually kept in a jar and used as an odorizer/scent producer; a medley, miscellaneous collection.

précis  *pre-SEE* or  *PRE-see*, originally, this is the French adjective corresponding to precise in English. The noun précis preserves the original meaning of the root *cid, cis* “to cut,” an abbreviated version, a summary.

savoir faire  *sa-wahr FEHR*  “to know how to do” – the knowledge of how to behave and what to do in various social situations.

tête-à-tête  *tet-uh-TET*  “head-to-head,” privately, usually just between two people.

vis-à-vis  *veez – ah- VEE*  “face-to-face,” used metaphorically for “in relation to, with regard to.”

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### 3 Latin

Historically, Latin has been the most important source of enrichment for the vocabulary of English. As pointed out in Chapter 3, as much as 17 percent of our active word stock is directly imported from Latin. The first Latin loans came to English fairly early – through contacts between the Romans and the Germanic tribes on the Continent before the fifth century A.D., through the adoption of Christianity and the translation of religious and literary texts from Latin into Old English. The trend continued through the Middle Ages, through Medieval scholasticism, and during the Renaissance when for many educated people Latin was an active second language. Even in modern times, Latin has remained one of the most common sources of borrowing. It was the language learned in high schools in the English speaking world by almost every educated individual throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even well into the twentieth century. Although that was not as true of education in America to the same extent as in Britain, a good reading knowledge of Latin was required for admission to most fields at America’s best universities until about 1940. After 1945 the number of Latin words borrowed into
English has declined sharply, just as the teaching of the classical languages in public schools and universities has declined sharply. Still, scholars have continued to turn to Latin when they need a new term for a new invention: myxomatosis (1952), nuclease (1952), pesticide (1950), video (1951). The borrowing of Latin words and phrases directly into English has traditionally depended on specific contexts – legal, religious, scientific – and as that exposure diminishes, so does the rate of borrowing.

**Latin terms in common use.** The majority of the Latin words and phrases listed below have come into the ordinary language through their use in specialized areas, primarily the field of law. You will find many more of the legal terms in the Workbook chapter dedicated to technical vocabulary (Chapter 12). Here we include only the ones that have “leaked out” into ordinary discourse, along with some other words and phrases that came directly from Latin in recent times. Some, like *ad hoc*, are so common that we would hardly realize they are not ordinary everyday English were it not for the odd spelling of *hoc*. Others like *carpe diem* seem to have acquired more general currency lately, judging from its popularity in recent films and on vanity plates. Others, like *recto/verso*, are only appropriate in special contexts: manuscript studies, paleography, printing, book-binding – you can’t use these words if you are giving road directions. Finally, some, like *advocatus diaboli* and *bona fide* have exact English translations; whether you use the Latin phrase or its English equivalent will depend on register, style, your personal judicious choice of the right word in the right context.

*ad hoc* “for this purpose,” anything constituted or put forward for a single occasion or for a special purpose – unlike *standing* committees we can have *ad hoc* committees, which when they have met their assignment are automatically discharged. Unlike *principled* arguments there can be *ad hoc* arguments, which are arguments without general applicability and therefore suspect.

*ad hominem* “to the person,” arguments not addressed to the issue but to feelings about the character of the other person.

*ad infinitum* “to infinity,” referring to any series or events that seem destined to go on without end, or at least *ad nauseam*, q.v.

*ad nauseam* “to nausea,” referring to a continuation of events that seems repetitious, boring, and interminable to the degree of being sickening.

*ad rem* “to the thing,” i.e., argument to the matter at hand, not irrelevant or far-ranging.

*advocatus diaboli* “devil’s advocate,” one who takes the opposite side of an argument just for the sake of argument, or at least to see whether the other point of view has any hope of success.
bona fide “in good faith,” sincerely and honestly.
carpe diem “pluck the day,” a metaphor for “enjoy the day, live to the full”: the enjoyment of the pleasures of the moment without concern for the future; often rendered in English as seize the day.
caveat “let him/her beware,” legal warning to a judicial officer to suspend the proceedings until the opposition has a hearing. It is now generalized as a countable noun to refer to any expressed reservation or caution, as in a contract or agreement; compare to cave canem “beware of the dog,” a sign intended to warn intruders to stay away.
ceteris paribus “other things being equal.”
cui bono “to whom good?,” i.e., who stands to benefit (e.g., who are all those political action groups working for, anyway?)
deus ex machina often abbreviated to deus, “god from a machine,” originally an unexpected rescue out of a genuinely hopeless situation, brought about in Greek drama by having a god descend on the scene from a contraption called machina. Now the expression is generalized to any illogical or miraculous situation where the cavalry arrives in the nick of time; viewed as an unacceptable trick in good fiction or drama because unmotivated.
et cetera, abbreviated etc., means “and other things”; the phrase – very common – “and etc.” is an embarrassing solecism, since it means “and and other things,” and demonstrates that the user does not know what etc. stands for.
excelsior “still higher,” motto of New York ex + cel “from the hill, rise, project,” compare excel, excellent.
in absentia “in absence,” e.g., getting a degree without being present at the awards ceremonies.
in medias res “into the middle of things,” without introduction or preparation, plunge right in.
in situ: “in position,” in the natural or original position.
in flagrante delicto, “while the crime is blazing,” in the very act of committing a misdeed, (caught) red-handed.
inter alia “among other things.”
ipso facto “by that fact itself,” by the very fact of something already having taken place.
lacuna “a blank space,” a missing part, gap, hole, generally in an abstract sense, like “a hole in the argument” or “a gap in the presentation”; the plural is lacunae.
lapsus linguae “slip of the tongue.”
lingua franca “French language,” referring in the Middle Ages to a blend of Italian + French + Spanish + Greek + Arabic spoken in the Mediterranean ports; now any of various languages (as Swahili, Latin) used as common or commercial tongues among
people of diverse speech, any method of communication resem-
bling a common language.

**magnum opus** “a great work,” one’s major achievement; the plural of
*opus* is *opera*.

**mea culpa** “through my fault,” a formal acknowledgement of personal
fault or error; see also *culpable*, *culprit*, *inculpate*, *exculpate*.

**mobile vulgus** “movable crowd,” referring to the fickleness of the
masses, from which we get the word *mob*.

**modulo** “except for.”

**modus vivendi** “a way of living,” feasible arrangement, practical com-
promise, especially one that bypasses difficulty – a way of getting
along with another person or nation in spite of basic differences.

**ne plus ultra** “not more beyond,” i.e., the absolute peak of perfection.

**nolens volens** “willy-nilly.”

**non sequitur** “it does not follow,” a characterization of an argument
which is believed to be illogical; used as a countable noun.

**nota bene** “note well,” abbreviated NB, meaning “pay attention.”

**obiter dictum** “something said in passing,” *ob* “by” + *iter* “way” – by
the way; an incidental and collateral opinion uttered by a judge but
not binding, any incidental remark or observation, a side remark, a
digression, the plural is *obiter dicta*.

**passim** “everywhere, throughout, here and there,” as in a document.

**per se** “in itself, as such,” to the exclusion of other considerations or
external circumstances.

**persona non grata** “an unwelcome person,” originally used in the
context of international diplomacy.

**placebo** “I shall please,” treatment prescribed for the mental relief of
the patient rather than for its actual effect, a mild, soothing harm-
less pill containing no real medication, sugar pill, a pill having no
effect whatsoever except psychologically, see also *complacent*,
*placate*, *placid*.

**prima facie** “on the first appearance,” at first view, before closer inspec-
tion.

**pro forma** “as a formality,” i.e., doing something because it is mandated
by the rules, not because of the ambition to achieve results.

**quid pro quo** “what for what,” something given or received in return for
something else, “appropriate exchange,” used negatively: mutual
exchange of favors.

**recto/verso** right-hand, left-hand page; the page to be read first/the page
to be read second.

**reductio ad absurdum** “reduction to absurdity,” often shortened simply
to *reductio*. It refers to a manner of argumentation in which it is
shown that if the same premisses are pushed to their logical con-
clusion, the conclusion will be ridiculous.
sic “thus, in this way,” usually added in a text after a grammatical or spelling error in a quotation, drawing attention to the error and making sure that the one quoting it is not perceived by other readers as the culprit.

sine qua non short for conditio sine qua non, meaning a necessary condition – literally “without which nothing.”

status quo “state in which,” i.e., the existing condition, the current state of things.

sub rosa “in confidence,” literally “under the rose” which doesn’t make much sense unless one knows that for the ancient Greeks the rose was the symbol of secrecy and confidentiality.

sub verbo “under the word,” abbreviated s.v., and most commonly used in dictionary entries to refer the reader to another word under which relevant information is to be found.

sui generis “of its own kind,” unique, peculiar, constituting a class alone.

tabula rasa “smoothed or erased tablet or writing surface,” a “clean slate”: more narrowly, a psychological term for the mind in its hypothetical primary blank or empty state at birth before receiving outside impressions.

verbatim “following the exact words,” word for word, the antonym for paraphrase. Used in reference to exact quotations, as in “a verbatim quotation.”

vita brevis is short for ars longa, vita brevis “art is long, life is short”; originally the ars in question was the art of healing (the original quotation is from the father of western medicine, Hippocrates), now extended to refer to the permanence of all serious forms of creative achievement in contrast to the brevity of human life.

The number of borrowings directly from Greek, outside the technical vocabulary of the medical and life sciences (which create new terminology very commonly from both Greek and Latin), is much smaller than what we get from Latin. The technical vocabulary of medicine is heavily based on Greek roots, and only slightly less so on Latin. The nomenclatures of botany and biology are almost entirely based on Latin and Greek. Entire books much longer than this one present the relevant vocabulary which must be studied by specialists in those fields. In the context of college life in North America familiarity with the names of the letters of the Greek alphabet is taken for granted, and some of them can be used metaphorically. Alpha, used as an adjective, can mean “high-or first-ranking,” beta is the second place in a
classification system, an iota is a minimal, vanishingly small quantity of something, and in the Workbook chapter on specialized vocabulary we cover the transferred medical meanings of chi, delta, epsilon. The sixteenth letter of the Greek alphabet, pi, has been borrowed by mathematicians as a symbol for the constant 3.14. The seventeenth letter, rho, was used by nineteenth-century philologists who introduced the term rhotacism; more recently the root rho was incorporated into another linguistic term rhotic, an adjective describing a variety of English in which the -r- sound is pronounced at the end of words and before consonants. The C- or S- shape of the eighteenth letter of the alphabet, sigma, has given us the words sigmoid “crescent-shaped” or “having a S-curve,” signodont, sigmoidoscope. The last letter of the Greek alphabet, the omega, has come to mean “the end,” as in the expression the alpha and omega “the beginning and the end.”

Semantic transfer. Many characters, places, notions from Greek mythology have made it into the common language through semantic transfer; we listed some of them earlier in this book. Many more can easily be added: aegis, agora, ambrosia, apostrophe, chorus, cynic, demon, echo, giant, hector, hero, labyrinth, lesbian, nemesis, orchestra, paean. In the common vocabulary of English one of the more reliable criteria pointing to the Hellenic origin of a word is the spelling with <-rh->: rhapsody, rheumatism, diarrhea, rhinoceros, rhythm. The spelling with <-hy-> is also most frequently the Latin rendition of Greek <-hu->. The latter spelling includes, among others, all the derivatives of hydr(o)- “water,” hyena, hygiene, hymen, all the derivatives of hyp(o)- “under” and hyper- “over, above,” hyssop, hysteria, etc. For common words, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether a loanword should be labeled “Latin” or “Greek,” since the Romans borrowed liberally from the Greeks, and the multiple strands of the classical vocabulary are inextricably tangled. The entries below are not of that kind – they are all clearly “Greek.” As in the previous sections, our list will not be comprehensive; we have been guided only by our own experience concerning the usefulness, frequency, and familiarity of the words and phrases listed here.

eureka “I have found it,” Archimedes’ cry as he ran naked from the bath, having hit upon the principle of buoyancy which enabled him to tell whether the gold crown of his king contained any baser metal. His discovery led to the formulation of the principle of flotation known as Archimedes’ principle. Eureka is the motto of the State of California.

hapax, short for hapax legomenon, pl. hapax legomena “once read,” a word or phrase recorded only once in a given body of text, a unique attestation of a word or expression.
heuristic hyou-RIS-tic “discovery through trial,” providing aid or direction in the solution of a problem; working out a solution by trial and error. Both a countable noun and an adjective: we can speak of “a heuristic,” meaning a particular set of procedures, or we can speak of “a heuristic solution,” meaning a solution which is arrived at by a series of closer and closer approximations. The opposite of heuristic is algorithmic, referring to a procedure that is guaranteed to succeed (e.g., an algorithm for determining all the prime numbers – an algorithm which happens not to exist).

hoi polloi HOY-puh-LOY “the many, the general populace, the masses, the common people”; hoi is the plural of the definite article. Though most people are unaware of this, saying “The hoi polloi are generally in favor of . . .,” we are saying, “The the polloi are generally in favor of . . .”

hubris HYOU-bris “away from proper behavior,” an act or disposition characterized by insolence, exaggerated pride or self-confidence, often resulting in retribution. The great Greek tragic heroes were usually guilty of hubris, and it was the main cause of their downfalls.

koiné coi-NAY, common or standard language, usually a dialect which has achieved the status of a literary standard used as a lingua franca among speakers of various dialects of one and the same language. A koiné is valuable as a unifying factor in a nation or smaller group, which is why koinés have been carefully cultivated, even created, in many parts of the world; koinés can unfortunately also be the cause for devaluation or even extinction of other dialects and languages.

kudos KOO-dos “fame, renown, prestige, resulting from achievement,” a singular noun. Phrases like “She received all sorts of kudos for her performance,” make the word appear, misleadingly, to be a plural form.

palindrome palin “back, again” + drom “run, course”: a word, verse or sentence that reads the same backwards and forwards ELBA – ABLE; ABLE WAS I ERE I SAW ELBA; MADAM I’M ADAM. It is a word game item.

panta rhei “all things flow”; the observation that everything is in a constant state of change, that all things are in a flux and therefore nothing can prevent change, was first made famous by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus (c.540–c.470 B.C.).

plethora pleth “to be full,” originally referring to a medical condition marked by a florid complexion (excessive blood), now generally referring to anything in overabundance, superfluity.

prolegomenon pro + leg, log “speak, write, study” – prefatory remarks, a formal essay or critical discussion serving to introduce and interpret
an extended work. Essentially the same as a preface or a foreword. The plural is prolegomena, which would be excessive if intended as an introduction to only one book.

5 German

In spite of (or perhaps because of) two world wars with Germany on the other side, English has borrowed relatively few words from German into the ordinary lexicon that still retain their German flavor, though there are numerous originally German words that have been fully assimilated, like rucksack, protein, kindergarten, seminar, lager, veneer, sauerkraut. The still unassimilated ones that are perhaps best known are these:

angst literally “fear”; a psychological term denoting intense and traumatizing anxiety, discomfort, often also guilt, associated with the conflict between man and society within an existentialist framework. The term came in vogue around the middle of the century and is associated with the philosophical and psychological schools of Heidegger and Freud; most frequently it is used in the collocation existential angst, or in the compound adjective angst-ridden.

anschluss AN-shloos “annexation,” also “political union,” more specifically the union between Nazi Germany and Austria accomplished by Hitler in 1938. Outside the European context, the term can be used more broadly to mean “any improper agreement involving occupation of foreign territories.”

blitzkrieg BLITS-kreeg literally “lightning war”; any offensive conducted with great speed and force, “sudden and overpowering,” the tactic of rapid and massive attacks, especially air raids, intended by Hitler to result in quick victory over the Allies, also used figuratively as in “she could not withstand the blitzkrieg of germs.”

doppelgänger DO-pul- GAN-gur “double-goer,” a ghostly version of a living person, also used to mean “a perfect likeness,” a “spitting image,” which itself is a mispronunciation of spit and image.

echt <ch> = /h/ “genuine, unadulterated, authentic.” According to the OED, George Bernard Shaw was the first to use the word in English during World War I, in the phrase “echt Junker opinions.”

ersatz er-ZATS “fake, substitute, imitation,” it also implies inferior quality. Ersatz can be used as the opposite of echt.

Festschrift FEST-shrift literally “celebration-writing,” it can also appear in lower case: festschrift, the plural is Festschriften or Festschriften – a collection of essays written in honor of a prominent scholar usually
marking an anniversary or an important period in that scholar's professional life.

führer FYU-er “leader,” sometimes also capitalized; a neutral word in German until Hitler proclaimed himself pompously the Führer of Germany in 1934, following Benito Mussolini’s example – Mussolini had called himself Il Duce “the leader” since 1922. Führer can be used figuratively for anyone who demands and asserts unrestrained authority and power the way the fascist leaders did.

gastarbeiter GAHST-AHR-bighter “guest-worker,” the compound conceals the real nature of the “guest-working”: after World War II the burgeoning German economy provided temporary, and not so temporary, menial jobs for immigrants from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Italy who did not have the privileges of German citizens. The term was borrowed into English in the mid-sixties and has become a synonym for cheap immigrant labor and lack of citizen’s rights.

gemütlichkeit guh-MYOOT-lich-kight cordiality, friendliness, coziness; a strongly positive word, based on the adjective gemütlich, which means “comfortable, cozy, good-natured.”

gestalt guh-SHTALT literally “shape, form,” a structure, configuration or pattern so integrated as to constitute a functional unit with properties not derivable from the sum of its parts.

gesundheit guh-ZOONT-hayt “health” (gesund = sound, as in sound mind in sound body); it is the polite and friendly thing to say in German when someone sneezes, the German for “bless you.” The word is more widespread in those parts of the States where there have been significant numbers of German immigrants.

lebensraum LEH-bens-roum literally “living space,” territory believed especially by Nazis to be necessary for national existence or economic self-sufficiency.

kaputt kuh-PUT “broken, destroyed, non-functional, out of commission”; the word was borrowed from German, which in its turn borrowed it from French, during the nineteenth century. Today its use is mostly confined to facetious or outright comic contexts.

kitsch KITCH a strongly derogatory word indicating decorations, pseudo-literary compositions, or any form of art which is gaudy, tasteless, pretentious, generally worthless.

lederhosen LEH-dur-HOH-zun “leather trousers,” in fact, leather shorts, usually held up by highly decorative suspenders; the characteristic Southern German, Swiss, and Austrian article of men's clothing that goes together with Alpine landscapes and yodeling.

leitmotiv LIGHT-moh-TEEF, also spelled leitmotif, “lead motif,” a dominant theme, a recurrent musical or literary pattern characterizing a composition, a novel, or the behavior of a character in an opera or a literary piece.
putsch: a secretly plotted and suddenly executed attempt to overthrow a government; the word became particularly popular in 1991 during the unsuccessful anti-Gorbachev putsch in fragile post-Soviet Russia.

realpolitik: literally “practical politics,” i.e., politics based on practical and material factors rather than on theoretical or ethical objectives.

schadenfreude: literally “damage”+“joy” – enjoyment obtained from the troubles of others.

sitzfleisch: literally “sitting flesh,” the ability to engage in activity which requires sustained concentration and persistence.

spritz: literally “to squirt, spray” – to spray briefly, to dilute alcoholic with non-alcoholic carbonated drink, compare also spritzer. Now often pronounced with initial /sp-/.

übermensch: “super-man.” During the last two centuries the word was first popularized by the German philosopher Nietzsche who developed the notion of a human being who has exceptional self-control, possesses enormous physical power, and is capable of super-human creativity. The word was then discredited by the Nazis who equated their notion of the superiority of one race, the Aryan race, with the notion of übermensch.

verboten: “forbidden,” in English the word is mostly associated with a sense of strong Prussian discipline, now appropriate only in comic circumstances and contexts.

wanderlust: literally “to wander, travel + desire, pleasure”: strong or un conquerable longing, impulse to travel.

schuss: a sports term, a precipitous straight downhill run in skiing, involving no turns to slow down the speed; also used figuratively for any fast and largely uncontrollable downfall.

yodel: a style of singing in which the normal singing voice alternates with a falsetto creating an interesting fluctuating musical effect.

Yiddish and other Germanic

Yiddish, a Germanic language with elements of its vocabulary from Hebrew and from the Slavic languages with which it was in contact in Eastern Europe, the Ukraine, and Russia, has provided some useful and colorful words in English. Yiddish was officially proclaimed the Jewish national language in 1903. Since Yiddish uses the Hebrew script, transcribing Yiddish words in the Roman alphabet often allows spelling variants; we have tried to record the most frequent ones, but our list of alternative spellings should not be assumed to be exhaustive.
chutzpah also hutzpah HOOT-spah – supreme self-confidence, nerve, gall. Ordinarily used with quite negative connotations.
goy, pl. goyim, also goys, from Hebrew goy “people, nation”; a non-Jewish person, a gentile.
kibbutz, pl. kibbutzim, also kibbutzes; a cooperative settlement in Israel based on joint ownership and sharing of the products of the collective enterprise. A member of a kibbutz is a kibbutznik.
kibitz, also kibbitz to meddle, to offer unwanted advice, especially someone watching a card game and making suggestions how to play the hand; a kibitzer is a busybody, a meddler.
klutz an awkward person, usually also taken to be less than bright.
kosher “right, fit”; allowed to be eaten according to the dietary or ceremonial laws of Judaism, extended to anything that is proper, legitimate, acceptable.
kvetch, also kvetsch “to whine, to find fault,” and doing so in an annoyingly plaintive voice; from German quetschen “to squeeze”; the noun can be either kvetch or kvetcher.
l’chaim, also l’chay(im), lechaim, lehayim, lechayim from Hebrew “to life,” a drinking toast, “cheers,” “good health.”
maven also mavin, mayvin, a knowledgeable person, an expert, a connoisseur.
mazel tov, also mazal tov, mazzel tov, “congratulations, good luck.”
mensch MENSH, the word means simply “man” in German; in Yiddish it has been narrowed and elevated to a human being of exceptional uprightness, a decent, honest, reliable human being; though the original noun is masculine, it can now be used for either gender
schlemiel shluh-MEEL, an individual of low reliability and not much to admire in the way of manners, a bungler.
schlimazel shluh-MAH-zul, extremely unlucky person, the kind that the American cartoonist Al Capp in the comic strip “Li’l Abner” always portrayed as going around with a cloud above his head, raining on him but not on anyone around him.
schlock cheap imitation, low quality, sleazy; cognate with German schlag “a blow,” originally “broken merchandise,” then generalized.

Other Germanic languages

Other Germanic languages have continued to influence the vocabulary of English, though the number of recent borrowings is somewhat limited. Some of the words which have been borrowed recently from other Germanic languages are:
apartheid *a-PAR-tight* Afrikaans, literally “a condition of being apart, separation,” referring to the formerly mandated separation of Africans and Europeans in South Africa.

berserk in Old Norse mythology warriors who fought with fury (bear + shirt/sark), now “violently or destructively frenzied.”

man(n)ikin *MAN-i-kin* literally “a small man,” a word borrowed from Dutch. The most famous *manikin* is the statue of the little boy urinating in Brussels; the word can also be used to mean a model used for teaching human anatomy. A variant spelling *mannequin* has been borrowed into French and thence to English; a *mannequin* is someone employed to model clothes; it is also the word for a model of a human figure on which clothes are displayed on shop windows and inside shops.

ombudsman, sometimes capitalized, < Swedish *ombud* “charge, commission,” a person appointed to deal with complaints by individuals against public authorities; figuratively, any person involved with arbitration between an individual and an institutional or public grouping.

skoal Danish *skaaal*, Old Norse *skal* “bowl,” now “drinking toast” used along with “here’s to your health.”

slalom Norwegian – a sloping track, “a downhill ski race,” also metaphorically “a zigzag or winding course, marked by obstacles or barriers.”

8 Italian

In Chapter 3 we discussed the influence of Italian opera on the musical vocabulary of English. More generally, Italian is the language which the great eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical composers found most suitable for expressing tempos and dynamics in their musical notation. This includes words like *allegro*, *largo*, *presto*, *andante*, *adagio*, *crescendo*, *piano*, *forte*, *glissando*, *soprano*, *ritardando*, *ritenuto*, *sostenuto*, *diminuendo*, *fortissimo*, *pianissimo*, all of which are familiar to musical cognoscenti, no doubt even to musical neonates. But these are by no means the only words we have borrowed from Italian. Others have come into English recently, including some of the entries below:

bambino “an infant, a small child,” the feminine form is *bambina*: when used in reference to a teenage girl or a young woman it can have demeaning sexual connotations.

cognoscente *KOG-nuh-SHEN-tee*. pl. *cognoscenti*, a Latinized Italian word based on the root √gn- “to know,” meaning a real expert,
someone who possesses superior knowledge and taste, usually in some branch of the arts.

che sarà, sarà keh suh-RAH suh-RAH literally “what will be, will be.”

diva, pl. divas or divi, originally “goddess,” related to divine. Since the end of the nineteenth century the term has been used for a leading female opera singer, a prima donna.

dolce far niente DOHL-chay FAR NEE-ent-uh, literally “sweet doing nothing” – pleasant relaxation in carefree idleness, compare the word dolci at the top of the desert menu in Italian restaurants. The root dol- < Italian, ultimately Latin dul- “sweet” should not be confused with dol-, dolor- “pain, suffering.”

dolce vita DOHL-chay VEE-ta, literally “sweet life” – a life of indolence and self-indulgence, a combination of luxury, frivolity, and licentiousness; the phrase was popularized in English following the international triumph of Federico Fellini’s classic film La dolce vita.

duce DOO-chey “leader” < duc “lead, pull,” see also under Führer above.

mafia literally “boldness,” name of an alleged international criminal organization, usually capitalized when referring to the criminal network based in Sicily. Now extended to apply to any malevolent and lawless clique with a very rigid internal hierarchy and an unbreakable sense of group loyalty, as the Russian mafia, the Labor Party mafia.

numero uno “number one,” sometimes used humorously as a synonym for “leading, first, top ranking, alpha.”

paparazzo, pl. paparazzi, a photographer who makes money from pictures taken in violation of the privacy of celebrities; the circumstances of the death of Princess Diana reinforced the already strong negative associations of this word.

prima donna, also spelled as one word, literally “first lady,” now also used in negative contexts; prima donna behavior is the conduct of a pretentious, arrogant, demanding person who expects special treatment and privileges where such may not be well earned.

sotto voce SOH-toh VOH-chay “under the voice, under the breath,” in an undertone, in a private manner, very softly.

viva voce VEE-vah VOH-chay “with the living voice, orally, aloud.”

9 Spanish

Spanish loanwords started entering the language at the time of the confrontation between England and Spain in the sixteenth century. Words borrowed then include those mentioned in Chapter 3: armada, bravado, canoe, cocoa, Negro, potato, sombrero, tobacco, yam. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, mostly as a result of contacts
in the southwestern U.S., English speakers started using words such as bonanza, coyote, gaucho, lasso, marijuana, stampede, vamoose (from vamos “let’s go”) and many more which are now part of our everyday vocabulary.

Spanish geographical names. In the same area in the United States, very large numbers of place names are directly borrowed from Spanish. Starting from the name of California’s capital, Sacramento, from Las Vegas to Los Angeles and San Francisco, Spanish place names dot the maps of California, Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas, Florida. A rich array of hagiographical names are also found in those regions: San Andreas, San Bernardino, San Diego, Santa Cruz, San Gabriel, San Fernando, San Marino, San José, San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, Santa Monica, Santa Rosa are all places familiar to Californians. Some place names are distinctly Spanish sounding: Buena Vista, El Cerrito, Los Gatos, La Jolla, (compare to the Texan city La Joya, also La Joya in NM). Spanish words can be recognized in various topographical, housing- and tourist-related contexts: adobe “sundried brick,” alameda “a tree-lined promenade,” as in Alameda County in CA. Fort Alamo has its name from the word alamo “a poplar tree,” alcatras < Portuguese alcatraz “a pelican, also the island on which pelicans nest,” has given the name of the infamous prison Alcatraz. Arroyo is “a stream bed, a gully,” as in Arroyo Grande, CA, Arroyo Hondo in NM, bodega “a wine shop,” turns up in Bodega Bay north of San Francisco, camarilla “a secret group, cabal,” compare Camarillo in CA. From Spanish we also have the words canyon (Sp. cañon), loma “a broad hill, a range,” compare Loma Linda, marina (also Italian) “a promenade by the sea,” cf. Marina del Rey, CA, mariposa “butterfly,” cf. Mariposa, CA, ocotillo “a spiny shrub,” cf. Ocotillo, CA, the word patio, playa “beach” as in Playa del Rey, CA, sierra “a sawtoothed range of mountains” as in the Sierra Nevada, salina “a salty pond or marsh,” cf. Salinas in CA, and the name of the hotel chain Ramada from the Spanish ramada meaning “an arbor, porch.”

The current situation. According to current estimates, about 12 percent of the US population is Spanish-speaking, and Spanish is the foreign language of choice for nearly 58 percent of high-school students, as against only 28 percent choosing French. In spite of these

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1 For the glosses of some of the Spanish words cited here, as well as for more examples of early borrowings from Spanish into English, see the article by John Algeo “Spanish Loanwords in English by 1900,” in Félix Rodríguez González, Spanish Loanwords in the English Language: A Tendency towards Hegemony Reversal. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996: 13–41.

2 A series of studies published in the volume Spanish Loanwords in the English Language, ed. González, explore various aspects of the Spanish lexicographical legacy and presence in English. The figures cited here are from the editor’s Introduction, p.2.
large numbers, much higher in Florida and the Southwest, relatively few words have entered the everyday English lexicon from these contacts, for the same reasons that so few words entered English from Celtic in the early history of the Germanic tribes in England. Three that are recognizably Hispanic and widespread in the general English lexicon are *gringo, machismo, and Chicano* (from *Mejicano*, pronounced *me-khi-KA-no*; the *ch-* results from the American effort to imitate the sound of *-j-* in *Mejicano*, since that sound does not exist in English). As in the lists of words from other languages, in selecting words of Spanish descent below, we have followed our practice of avoiding terms for food and drink, which are quite numerous.

**barrio** literally “district, suburb,” but in English generally refers to a poor Spanish-speaking immigrant neighborhood.

**corrida** short for “corrida de toros,” a bull-fight.

**embarcadero** “wharf” or “quay”; the most famous one called by this name in America is probably the San Francisco Embarcadero, now mainly a tourist attraction near Fisherman’s Wharf, but a thriving port until the early 70s.

**gringo** a Mexican-Spanish contemptuous name for Anglo-Americans.

**hombre** literally “man,” but as borrowed into English it has a strong sense of *machismo* (see below) connected with it.

**incommunicado** “out of communication,” as in solitary confinement.

**macho** “masculine, vigorous,” but meaning ostentatiously giving the impression of toughness and virility.

**mañana** “tomorrow,” but used in English mainly to mean “to put things off yet another day.”

**mestizo, fem. mestiza,** originally the offspring of a Spaniard and an American Indian, now generalized to refer to mixed blood generally, or to a full-blooded Central or South American Indian who has adopted European ways.

**niño** “child,” referring to “THE child,” i.e., the Christ child, celebrated during the Christmas season. The shortened form *El Niño* from *El Niño de Navidad* refers to a complex body of weather phenomena on the west coast of Central and North America generated by unusually warm Pacific waters and often producing heavy rains. The feminine form is *el niña*.

**parador** – a chain of inns or hotels in Spain, usually magnificently renovated historic buildings

**pronto** – “quick” – though the word is identical in Italian and could have been borrowed from there through its use in music, the American usage of it meaning “right away” was borrowed from Spanish in the contacts all over the Southwest.
Geographically and historically, English has had very limited contacts with the Russian language. The twentieth century, however, has been a time of intense international contacts, friendly or otherwise, of huge demographic shifts, of collapsing political systems, and the development of transport and communication technologies which make national boundaries vanish. Seventy years of communism in the Soviet Union naturally gave rise to many concepts and terms associated with the specific economic and political realities in the largest adversary of the “West”; you will recognize the historical importance of some of these items listed below. Included are also some Russian words which are familiar from descriptions of Russian customs and articles of clothing. Finally, with the political changes at the end of the 1980s we have become acquainted with some new political terms, though the major direction of vocabulary transfer through the twentieth century, and especially most recently, has been from English into Russian.

apparatchik literally “one who operates within a power structure” (apparat), especially a political party – pejorative due to its association with the communist regime, implying blind and strict obedience to the dogmas of a party political establishment.

babushka literally “grandmother, old woman,” in English changed by metonymy to mean the kind of headgear elderly Russian women wore traditionally, a head scarf, folded into a triangle and tied under the chin.

dacha, also spelled datcha “a country house.”

duma, DOO-mah, also spelled douma literally “thought,” though the word was extended to mean an elected governing body between 1905–1917; it has now been reintroduced as a synonym for “parliament.”

glasnost GLASS-nost literally “voicing, publicity,” with amelioration of meaning: open and frank discussion of political and economic realities initiated by Soviet President Gorbachev in the mid 1980s; any such openness.

gulag GOO-lag, originally, an acronym for the Russian state agency on labor camps, an ignominious term for a detention or labor camp; the word was popularized in the West by Solzhenitsin’s famous novel The Gulag Archipelago.

kolkhoz “cooperative farm”; membership of the kolkhozes was forced on the Soviet farmers.

kulak originally “a miserly person,” an extended meaning of the literal meaning of kulak “fist”; during the years of forceful collectivization
the word was used as a derogatory term for any landowner who was opposed to the regime and was therefore regarded as a dangerous class enemy.

mir “peace” – for most speakers today the word is associated with the space station Mir, but, in fact, the word is a common Slavic root for both “peace” and “world.”

nyet “no,” used almost exclusively in humorous contexts.

perestroika literally “rebuilding, reconstruction,” with amelioration of meaning – the program of political reform in the Soviet Union started by President Gorbachev in 1986, which resulted in the disintegration of the former communist regime in the country; any such reorganization and rebuilding.

politburo “political bureau/agency,” during the communist era, the chief executive committee of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union and in other East European countries, a governing body vested with almost unlimited power.

samizdat “self-publishing.”

samovar “self-boil” – a tea urn, usually a stately and stylish household object.

soviet (as in Supreme Soviet) literally “council, advice” – a government body, council, usually hierarchized.

sputnik literally “co-traveller” – any of a series of earth-orbiting satellites. The Russian suffix -nik “one who” has been borrowed from Slavic into English and has produced beatnik, computernik, filmmnik, flopnik, kibbutznik, CIA-nik, MITnik, peacenik, refusenik, stay-putnik, among others.

troika “a threesome,” originally a vehicle drawn by three horses abreast, now used almost exclusively to refer to a governmental commission or administrative group of three powerful individuals.

11 Japanese

As many as 222 Japanese words have been recorded in English since 1949. The recent ones include 16 culinary items, 25 business items, 20 art words, 14 sports terms and 9 religious words. Some Japanese words have been incorporated into English to suit commercial interests including such words as walkman and pac-man.

banzai – originally a shout or cheer meaning “10,000 years,” the term came to be known in English mainly through the suicidal attacks

of ground troops or aircraft by Japanese soldiers and airmen near the end of World War II.

**bonsai** – an intentionally dwarfed plant or tree; the practice, highly cultivated in Japan, appears to have started because of the scarcity of land on the densely populated Islands.

**haiku** – a form of Japanese verse, or an imitation of one in another language.

**hara-kiri** – ritual Japanese suicide formerly practiced by the samurai warriors.

**ikebana** – a formal Japanese flower arrangement.

**kana** – Japanese syllabic writing, both hiragana and katakana.

**karate** – an unarmed form of Japanese combat using both hands and feet.

**kimono** – loose garment, flowing sleeves, used as a dressing gown, fastened with a sash.

**kanji** – Chinese ideographs used in Japanese writing; these are the primary instruments of Japanese writing, supplemented by kana.

**kabuki** – traditional form of Japanese drama, highly stylized, all parts played by males.

**kamikaze** – “divine wind,” originally referring to the wind which destroyed an invading Mongol navy in the thirteenth century, now referring to the suicide pilots near the end of World War II who dived into enemy warships with their aircraft loaded with explosives.

**ninja** – a hired warrior in feudal Japan who has undergone superior training in martial arts.

**origami** – Japanese art of folding paper into elegant and complex designs.

**sayonara** – “goodbye.”

**shogun** – hereditary commanders of the Japanese military forces until 1867, when the Mikado took control again.

**tsunami** – a tidal wave caused by a major undersea earthquake.

**zoris** – literally “straw” + “footwear,” originally thonged sandals with straw soles, now soles of rubber or plastic or other materials.