

## TAILPIECE

### ‘EAT HOTTO DOGGU ...’

J. TREEN

English is mixing and marrying other languages around the world. Sometimes the 'borrowed' words and phrases remain intact; other times they blend with local languages to create new words and pronunciations barely understandable in another English-speaking country. A discothèque in Hong Kong is a *dixie-go*, for example, and to be a 'swinger' in Ecuador is *travoltarse* (for Jon Travolta). Turn on *der TV* in West Germany and you might hear *der talkmaster* on *eine talkshow* conduct *das interview* with *der author of der bestseller*. Visit Japan and you could buy a *nekutai* in a *depatto* or eat *hotto doggu* and drink an *orenji jiusu*. And in the Soviet Union, teenage children of high-ranking officials love to *veendserf*, wear *dzheenzi*, fly in *glidera* or smoke *mentolovky*. To them anything *importnaya* is imported.

So many French and West Germans casually and constantly mix English words with their native tongues that the resulting hybrids are called *Français* and *Denlisch*. In France such words as *le drugstore*, *le playboy*, *le babysitter* and *le weekend* are in everyday use. In Germany the number of Anglicisms may be as high as 80 000. Words such as *das appeasement*, *der soundtrack*, *die jeans* and *das happy-end* abound. Even words that simply sound like English are popular: *der dressman* is a male model and *der showmaster* is the host on a television programme.

Governments in both Bonn and Paris have tried to eliminate English words - with mixed success. For years the German post office, which runs the country's telephone system, insisted on the word *fernsprecher* when everyone else was using *telefon*. Last year the post office finally caved in and removed *fernsprecher* from all directories and phone booths.

In France the attempts to expunge Franglais are decidedly formal. The High Committee of the French Language draws up lists of 'un-French' sounds in hopes that government workers - and the general public - will avoid them. The committee also invents replacements. The portable Walkman stereo radio, for example, was renamed a *balladeur*.

In the Soviet Union there has been only some resistance to the onslaught of English words - perhaps because the Russians are accustomed to foreign influences. English currently flavours the language of popular culture, technology - even government. A Muscovite can drink a *viskey* or a *dzhinintonik*, or go to a *dzhazz saission*. A scientist can work on *komputeri* and a government official can prepare the *budzhyet* or even fudge a *statistika* along the way.

The Japanese readily absorb English words into their language, often giving them new forms and new meanings. A person who has a driver's licence but rarely drives a car is a *pepaa doraibaa* (paper driver); a young man who likes to date older women is a *madamu kiraa* (madam killer). And a divorced man responsible for his children is a *Kuraama-zoku* (from the film 'Kramer Vs Kramer'). There is even a verb, *Makudonaru*, to eat at McDonald's. The Japanese also shorten and combine words such as *pasokon* or personal computer.

Pidgin English - the marriage of English and a local tongue - is both colourful and phonetic. Linguists have identified more than 100 varieties of these polyglot tongues worldwide. Some experts look down on pidgins, seeing them as little more than baby talk. Others, however, argue that pidgins are full-fledged languages. Melanesian Pidgin is one of three official languages in Papua New Guinea and more than 750 000 of the people speak it. Some examples: the phrase that means to mourn is *sori long*, to marry is *kisim ring* and to remember is *holim long ting tin*.

Sometimes the merger of English with a local language does not appear to be a merger at all because the vocabulary is entirely in English, while the grammar and pronunciation and the thought processes are clearly local. This is particularly true in India. A busy schoolteacher there might tell a pupil: 'Don't you know I am not vacant? Come behind.' Or a happy person might say, 'My heart is garden-garden.'

An American university professor received the following letter from Taiwan:

'Would you mind enlightening the thirsty palmer languishing in the icy quagmire of despondency on the names and addresses of the professors adorning the department of linguistic science, University of Illinois?'

Linguists contend that such distortions make it difficult for people speaking different forms of English to communicate easily. But the problem is not expected to get better. In fact, it could get worse - an ironic lack of communication in a language that is dominating the world.

(Reprinted with the permission of the *Sunday Times*.)