

Very handy indeed

Ian McMaster

While the German language has been busy stealing – sorry, borrowing – hundreds of words from English, I've been running a one-man campaign to get English to take over a single German word. I am sad to say that, so far, I have failed.

The word in question is Handy. This is the ideal description for a phone that you hold in your hand and that is »handy« (*handlich*). If only it would join all the other German words we have in English, such as kindergarten, schadenfreude, rucksack and leitmotif.

I shall continue my campaign, but until I succeed, the correct translations for Handy will remain »mobile (phone)« in British English and »cell(ular)« phone in American English.

So, for example, if you are out of the office on a business trip, you could say to your colleagues:

- »You can get/reach me on my mobile.«
- »I've got my cell phone with me.«
- »I'll be available on my cell phone.«
- »Give me a call/bell/buzz on my mobile.«

One problem with mobile phones, however, can be the reception (*Empfang*). If the signal is getting weak you could say:

- »Sorry, Debbie. The reception's not very good.«
- »Sorry, Mike. You're breaking up.«
- »Sorry, Paul. I didn't catch that. What was the number again?«
- »We're just going into a tunnel, Peter. Could you call back in a few minutes?«

In extreme cases, you might need to go back to using a conventional phone:

- »I'll call you back on the landline

(*Festnetzleitung*) when I get to the hotel.«

- »Have you got a landline I can reach you on?«
- »Let me give you the landline number.«

Practice giving your telephone number simply and clearly. The best way is to say each digit separately (say »22« as »two, two« rather than »double two«). Don't use the German system of saying »2846« as »twenty eight, forty six«. You can say »zero« instead of »oh«:

- »You need to call 0049 (»oh, oh, four, nine«) for Germany, and then 0175 (oh, one, seven, five), 522748 (five, two, two, seven, four, eight).«
- »The landline is 0044 (»zero, zero, four, four«) for England, 20 (two, zero) for London, and then 567857 (»five, six, seven, eight, five, seven«).«

If people can't get through to you on your mobile, you can ask them to leave a voicemail message. When you have listened to the message, you can return the call:

- »If you can't get hold of me, leave a message on my voicemail.«
- »Sorry, Paul. I was on the plane when you called.«
- »Hi there, Angela. I must have been talking to Jack when you rang.«
- »Hello, Anna. I just got your message. I think we were in a tunnel when you called.«

When you are abroad, you may need to contact directory enquiries (US: directory assistance) to get a particular phone number:

- »Could you give me the country code (*Ländervorwahl*) for Jamaica, please?«
- »Excuse me, what is the dialling (US: area) code (*Ortsvorwahl*) for Manchester?«

- »What number do I need to dial for Poland?«

If someone is calling you from abroad from a mobile phone, it is polite to offer to call them back:

- »Can I take your number and call you back?«
- »Give me your number and I'll ring you back.«
- »Are you on your mobile? This must be costing you a fortune. Let me call you back.«

Of course, instead of using your mobile to phone, you might want to send a text message (SMS). The English verb for this is simple and regular, »to text«:

- »I'll text you this afternoon.«
- »Could you text the number through to me?«
- »I texted you the figures this morning. Didn't you get them?«

Let people know if you have a mobile phone with BlackBerry technology, to which your office e-mails are forwarded:

- I'll be in Cologne and Dusseldorf for the next two days, but will be able to pick up my e-mails on my BlackBerry.
- Could you send that through to me in an e-mail. I'll have my BlackBerry with me.
- I'll answer your e-mails tomorrow while I'm on the road.

Mobile phones really are handy things, aren't they? It's just a shame that we don't call them that. But I'm not giving up.

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