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II.

ZWISCHEN DEUTSCH UND ENGLISCH:

BILINGUAL PUNS

GRANDMOTHER'S PUNS

Grandmother Joss had a quiet sense of humor and was not above having a little fun with the language:

In Bensenville the church bell was rung at 5 p.m. every Saturday afternoon to remind us that the following day would be Sunday and our presence in church would be appreciated. Grandmother's usual comment was: "Ah, die Kirche bellt schon."

When it came time in the late afternoon to turn on the light, Grandmother would flick the light switch with a mischievous twinkle in her eye and say, "Let's have a little hell in here."

When my aunt and uncle would be leaving to visit mutual friends they would say something like, "We're leaving now to call on the Mumstermans," and Grandmother would reply, "Well, grease them for me."

Grandmother's world was completely English in her later years, but she always preferred the German language - for her private devotions and prayers. When we sang a hymn in church that she knew in German, if you listened closely you would hear her singing softly in German.

Grandmother used to call on Mrs. Grobe who lived just down the street. Upon her return, Grandmother would recap her conversation with Mrs. Grobe. The ladies evidently always began speaking English, but within a very few minutes they would lapse into their favorite High German. We always knew exactly when this transition would occur for Grandmother would say, "Und dann hat sie gesagt..." and we knew they'd been down to some really serious conversation.
PUT THAT AWAY

Grandfather Joss was not above a bit of teasing. Once I inquired of Grandmother, "How do you say 'put that away' in German?"

Before she could reply, Grandfather said something like: "Nimm und durch den Tür schmeissen."

"Schmeissen?" I looked at him in utter bewilderment. What was I hearing?

Grandfather's face was impassive as always but his brown eyes behind his horn rimmed glasses twinkled with mirth.

HIER IST DEIN KÖRBCHEN!

Once when I was in my teens my grandparents and I were enjoying some fresh plums on my summer holiday with them.

The little plum pit reminded me of the dainty little carved peach basket worn by a high school classmate. I described the "darling little basket" at great length as only a teenager could do. Finally Grandfather abruptly got up and went downstairs.

I thought sadly, "Well, I guess there's a limit to the amount of girlish chatter a man can stand. But a few minutes later Grandfather came upstairs and tossed a small brown object in my direction, commenting, "Na! Hier ist dein Körbchen!"

He had carved a tiny basket out of the plum stone! Later, when we had our first peaches, he made me a peach basket also.

COUNTRY DANCE

This little episode happened in the early 1900's before Hedwig and Hulda, the two eldest Joss daughters, were married. They had attended a delightful local dance and had returned home quietly, a bit late, and were in their upstairs bedroom talking over the events of the evening.
Hedwig and Hulda had found much to please them -- the music, the flowers, and the gallant young men who whirled them around the dance floor --

"... and the style!" squealed fashion-conscious Hulda.

Suddenly there was an outraged bellow from the bedroom below: "Ja, ja! Never mind the style! MACH DAS DU INS BETT GEHST!"
Frederick Joss had the last word.

MODERATION

Grandfather Joss was a believer in moderation at all times. According to an oft-told tale he had done a trifling favor for his nephew's wife, an exuberant young woman with an Italian Swiss background.

"Onkel, ich danke dir tausend mal!" Giulia exclaimed.

"Ja, ja. Halb so viel wird auch genug," replied Grandfather.

BILINGUAL PUN

As a little girl on my grandfather's farm in the 20's I remember Grandfather's friends greeting him with, "Wie gehts, Fritz."

"Oh, the gate's all right, but the fence is broken," Grandfather would reply.

In 1985 I asked a Bensenville friend whose parents had come from Germany in the very early 30's if she had ever heard this expression. Frieda laughed and said, "My father used it all the time. And we spoke only 'good' German in our house."

I am quite sure this expression was used by all the German farmers in rural Bensenville which is now part of O'Hare International Airport.

It would be interesting to know if this clever pun in German and English were used in other parts of the country.
CHRISTMAS GREETING

Grandfather Joss never wished anyone a Merry Christmas. Instead, he always said, "Merry Kriegsnichts." I was told this was a pun meaning "merry receive nothing."

BENSENVILLE ANGLO-DEUTSCH

The small town of Bensenville, Illinois, about 17 miles northwest of Chicago, was founded by a number of German families, and attracted retired German farmers from what is now the O'Hare Airport area, as well as natives of Germany who came - as Henry Jonas did, from Germany to become our baker, Laumann was the butcher and Schmidt came from Austria. The shoemaker spoke half English and half German when discussing shoe repair.

Sometimes the German had a little English gemixed with it and sometimes a German word was anglicized.

The following conversation was overheard in a Bensenville grocery store many years ago:

Customer: Where did you put the chocolate marshmallow cookies?
Clerk: In the bottom of the bag.
Customer: Ach, Dummkopf! Es wird alles gemasched sein.

My father talking about a farm deal he had to pass up: "Ich konnte es nicht schwingen."

The shoemaker called a lift a "blatt" and when I asked for metal tips on my shoes he referred to them as "hoofeisen."

A delightful elderly lady in Bensenville was Mrs. Martha Baumgartner whose German accent belied her lifetime in the United States. She said she always bawled out her daughters in Low German because she could talk faster in Plattdeutsch. It wasn't only what she said, but her accent and inflection made it even more hilarious.

Once when I admired Mrs. B's pretty set of breakfast dishes with its border of strawberries, she replied, "Ja, dey look all right, but after you use dem for a while all die ears is off die cups."
When I visited her shortly after my move to Chicago and told Mrs. B. about my new apartment she said, "Ach, bei good people it always goes good yet, ain't it?"

Two words that were used in Bensenville were "verknausched" and "verknudelt."

Verknausched meant squashed: i.e., "I saw Herman's car after he ran into the tree. It was really verknausched."

Verknausched also meant intoxicated, i.e., "Ed really was verknausched when he went to the anniversary party."

"Verknudelt" meant confused: "I sat down to study my income tax and inside of ten minutes I was ganz verknudelt."

ES HAT GENUG GEREGENET

The five Joss children attended German confirmation school at St. John's Church in Addison, Illinois. Classes were conducted entirely in German. It was an excellent way for the children to learn High German as well as to fulfill the requirements for church membership.

One story handed down through the years in the Joss family concerned the youngest daughter Emily, who arrived late one morning, delayed by a heavy rainstorm. Emily found herself the last of seven pupils lined up in front of the pastor to offer an excuse for tardiness.

The first pupil began: "Es hat geregenet ... and my mother said to wait until the rain was over."

The next pupil began: "Es hat geregenet ... and my father said to wait and when it stopped he would hitch up and take me to school."

Finally it was little Emily's turn to explain. Timidly she began: "Es hat geregenet ..." but the pastor stopped her.

"Ja, ja," he said wearily, "es hat genug geregenet. Nimm dein Platz."
CABBAGE SOUP

Samuel Bigler's wife, Annie, believed that children should clean up their plates at every meal. Oscar and Florence Bigler learned this the hard way when they turned up their noses at the cabbage soup one evening.

The following day the cabbage soup was warmed up for lunch. When the soup went uneaten, it was heated up again and served to the children for their evening meal.

By this time, Oscar was quite hungry and managed to choke down most of the, by now very unappetizing, cabbage soup. His admiring sister Florence asked him in German how he managed to eat the soup. Oscar replied: "Ich gleich ess. Ich nicht lang schmeck."

IF YOU CAN'T DO ANY BETTER

Victor Kulp met his wife, Giulia Koelleker of Milan, while he was on a trip to Europe. According to the story, he was admiring the view from his hotel balcony when he became aware of a dark-haired young lady on a nearby balcony who was also enjoying the view.

Giulia was the daughter of a wealthy Italian Swiss businessman in Milan. She had studied English in London, French in Paris, and spoke German and Italian fluently. Her parents were accustomed to inviting opera singers to their villa to entertain their guests.

On one particular visit with Giulia's parents, Victor found himself speaking German with his very elegant mother-in-law. When Victor couldn't think of the word he wanted in German he said it in English and went on with his sentence. This did not go unnoticed, and the aristocratic dame said sharply, "You know that I prefer to hear German spoken, but if you can't do any better than that, please speak English!"

So Victor Kulp, Phi Beta Kappa, summa cum laude graduate of the University of Chicago, professor of law at the University of
Oklahoma in Norman, was bawled out by his mother-in-law!

Victor took great delight in telling this story to his Aunt Emma when he returned to the States.

PAY FOR IT

Victor Kulp's reputation as an expert in oil and gas law was known to all lawyers in Oklahoma. It was not uncommon for a lawyer who was having a problem with a case to enlist the aid of one of Victor's students. Whenever a student questioned him closely and asked very specific questions, Victor knew that a lawyer on the outside was having a problem with a case. It was Victor's custom to ask the student to see him after class. He would hand him his business card to give to the lawyer who needed help. If a lawyer wanted Victor Kulp's advice, he could pay for it!

COMMENTARY ON SWISS WIVES

My two Swiss (American-born) aunts, Hulda and Emily, had black eyes and were both inclined to be rather sharp-tongued.

One winter evening their husbands, Halvdan Stabell and Ben Schmidt were delegated to go to the farm and pick up the mortgage payment from the Greek farmer, Chrisjohn, who had purchased the Joss farm.

When Chrisjohn met the two men at the door he said to his wife: "Wife, take their coats." Wife did as she was ordered.

Later, Chrisjohn felt something was needed to conclude the business of the evening. "Wife, get some wine," he ordered. Wife came with three glasses of wine.

When my uncles were ready to leave, Chrisjohn ordered, "Wife, get their coats." Wife brought the two overcoats.

Like all farmers of that day, Chrisjohn made his own wine. "Wife, go downstairs and bring up two bottles of wine." Wife came upstairs with two bottles of homemade wine, which were presented to my uncles.
Halvdan and Ben looked at each other with a knowing smile.
"It's certainly not like that at my house," said Halvdan Stabell. "Mine either," agreed Ben Schmidt.

"Yessss. You Americans," replied Chrisjohn scornfully.

FROM PLATTDEUTSCH TO HOCH DEUTSCH

My father's favorite German story concerned his youngest brother William who went to Sunday School for the first time.

"Na, was hast du in der Sonntag Schule gelernt?" asked his father upon William's return.

"Wenn du keine Feybel hast, du kannst nicht in der Sonntag Schule gehen," replied little William.

It seems that Uncle Bill thought "Febel" must be Low German because they used that word at home, and in High German it should be pronounced "Feybel."

SCHWIZERDÜTSCH

Emilie used to wonder when she was quite small who these big black-bearded men were whom her mother greeted with such joy. Her older brothers were always good to her, bringing Emilie little gifts when they returned from a trip.

One brother always promised Emilie "Ein langes, langes warteli und ein goldenes nütel." He faithfully brought her gifts, but never the "goldenes nütel." When she was older she realized he had promised her a "long, long wait and a golden nothing."

Many years later when I would go downtown on Saturday, I would ask Grandmother if there was anything she needed. She would reply with a twinkle in her eyes that she wanted, "Ein langes, langes warteli und ein goldenes nütel."
One summer when Emilie was just a little girl she watched her older brother Johann cut grass with a scythe. Operating a scythe takes skill and a good farmer can mow grass with a scythe as closely and evenly as he could with a machine. A whetstone, however, is needed to sharpen the blade. To avoid losing his whetstone, Johann placed it in a handy spot — through the hole of a nearby hitching post.

Seeing the ends of the whetstone protrude from both sides of the post, Emilie thought it would be fun to hang on and dangle from the whetstone. She did, and to her surprise the whetstone broke in two. When her brother scolded her, she declared heatedly in her Swiss dialect: "Ich ha nie gwüsst, dass en isige stei verheit!" (I did not know that an iron stone would break.)

Great-grandmother Bigler believed in going to bed early and rising early. "Achte ins Bett machte," she would say when the clock struck eight, and shooed her flock off to bed.

Hoopskirts were in fashion when Emilie was young, but as a child she wore them mostly for "good." She remembered her mother calling her and saying, "Company is coming. Hurry and put on your hoops; you look so 'schwabbelig' (sloppy) with your skirts hanging straight down."

FINDING AN ENGLISH MEANING IN A GERMAN SENTENCE

I had told about the telephone call I'd received the evening before. A charming male voice had inquired caressingly, "Bist du da?" (How I wished that call had been for me!) Not wishing to embarrass the man with the nice voice, I replied simply, "I'm afraid you have the wrong number." He apologized in perfect English and hung up.

A quick-witted girl with a Swedish background said, "What you should have said was, "I'm sorry, Miss Doo-Dah isn't here."

"Bist du da?" sounded to her like "Miss Doo-Dah." Her clever reply would never have occurred to anyone who understood German.
ON PAYING THE FARE

One day many years ago, that seemed quite dull and endless, I begged for someone "to tell me something funny so I could laugh."

Betty Marx, who was "real German," said hesitantly, "I could tell you the story my mother told me the other evening when she came back from the Damenverein."

It seems that Betty's mother and her friend were speaking German when they boarded the streetcar, and the following conversation ensued:

Mrs. Marx: "Ich will die Fahrt bezahlen."
Friend: "Nein, nein, lass mich."
Mrs. Marx: "Nein, die Fahrt ist mein."
Conductor: "Ladies, I don't care whose fart it is, just give me the fare."

Betty continued: "I really don't think Mother realized what was funny. She just thought it was something witty that the conductor said."

TRANSLATING FROM THE GERMAN INTO ENGLISH

At the Rogue Valley Manor I had the pleasure of meeting a delightful German lady who previewed my German anecdotes and contributed one of her own.

She lived at the time in an area of New York City where many people spoke German. Mrs. Beck had suffered a rather painful corn and went to the drugstore for a remedy.

"Can you give me something for a hen's eye?" she asked the clerk. "Oh, you have a corn," replied the Jewish pharmacist.

Elly Beck said she couldn't figure out just what a Hühnerauge had to do with a grain.
INTRODUCTION TO A CONCERT

On the Medford radio, a music critic was discussing a conductor who could speak several languages, but had trouble with German. He found it a very confusing language.

"Morgen in German has several meanings," the conductor claimed. "It means 'today,' 'tomorrow' and is also a greeting." Here goes the proof:

The musician went into an umbrella shop in Berlin and overheard a conversation that revolved around a repaired umbrella:

Shopkeeper: Morgen.
Man: Morgen.
Shopkeeper: Morgen.
Man: Ach, Morgen. (Realizing the umbrella would be ready tomorrow.)
Shopkeeper: Morgen.
Man: Ja. Morgen.