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German and English: The two sisters who each went her own way

Students of linguistics are often surprised to find out that the origins of the English language are to be traced in Germany. However, since the days of VENERABLE BEDE (8th-century monk and scholar from Jarrow, Northumberland) the traditional view has been that Germanic peoples were settling in Celtic Britain between the mid-5th and late 6th century though more recent archaeological evidence points to the presence of some Germanic people in south Britain from as early as the turn of the 5th century. In his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* BEDE himself writes that the company led by two Saxon leaders (brothers Hengest and Horsa) came to the Isle of Thanet in Kent in AD 449 at the invitation of the Celtic King Vortigern, who had asked (and paid) them to deal with the problem of attacks by savage tribes from northern Britain. Being experienced warriors, the Saxons did their job very quickly, but they also shared the knowledge about the abundant and unprotected island of Britain with their Germanic cousins from the continent, for whom Britain became the land of opportunity. Soon they started coming in their thousands, meeting relatively little resistance on the part of native Celts, pushed to the mountainous regions of modern Scotland, Wales and Cornwall.

The collective name for the Germanic peoples who came to Britain at the time is Anglo-Saxons (*Die Angelsachsen*), but it is known that there were at least five different tribes. Apart from Angles, Saxons and Jutes there were also some Frisians and Franks among the invaders. The Jutes came from the southern part of Jutland (now Denmark), Saxons from what is now called Lower Saxony (*Niedersachsen*) and the homeland (*Urheimat*) of the Angles was the Baltic peninsula called Angeln, east of Flensburg, protruding into the Bay of Kiel in southern Schleswig, as can be seen in the following map:

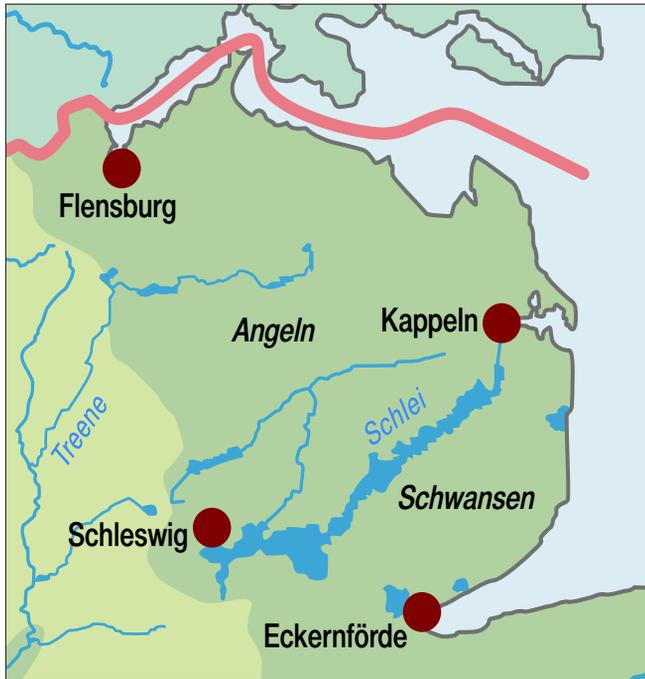


Fig. 1. The map of Angeln peninsula

Source: http://oookaboo.com/o/pictures/picture/23361440/The_map_shows_both_the_Angeln_penins.

Although early Anglo-Saxons did not form a single political organism, they referred to their new homeland as *Angelcynn* (literally ‘Angle-race’) in order to reflect their common identity. The name *Englaland* ‘land of Angles’, source of modern ‘England’, was for the first time used by the Vikings in the 11th century. The regular adjective was *Anglisc*, in which, however, the first vowel underwent West Germanic mutation (*Umlaut*) and is more commonly found in Old English texts as *Ænglisc* and *Englisc* (obviously, hence the modern word English).

It seems obvious that as long as Anglo-Saxons were living on the continent their language cannot have been different from other West Germanic dialects spoken in what is now northern Germany. Except for brief runic inscriptions there is no substantial written evidence of the language from either Britain or Germany from the earliest period (5th–6th century), but from the 8th century onward (about three centuries after Anglo-Saxons had left their *Urheimat*) both German and especially English are very well attested. In particular Old Saxon (*Altsächsisch*, the ancestor of modern Plattdeutsch) and Old English display great similarity, for example lines 2389–2392 (1a) from the alliterative Old Saxon poem *Heliand*, the story of Jesus’ life, translated into Old English would be (1b):

- (1a) *stod thegan manag uerod bi themu uuatare thar uualdand Crist obar that liudio folc lera sagde.*

- (1b) *stod þegna¹ manig werod bi þam wætre þær wealdend Crist ofer þæt leoda folc lare sægde.*
 ‘a great multitude of disciples stood by the water where Lord Christ said this parable to the people.’

Old High German (*Althochdeutsch*) dialects are not as similar, but an Old English speaker would have communicated with a person from central Germany without great difficulty; compare the first two sentences from the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11–12) from the late 10th-century Old English *West Saxon Gospels* (2a) and the 9th century Old High German Gospel Harmony of *Tatian* (2b):

- (2a) *He cwæð: Soðlice sum monn hæfde twegen suna. Ða cwæð se gingra to his fæder, Fæder, sele me mine dæl minre æhte þe me to gebyreþ.*
 (2b) *Quad tho: sum man habata zuuene suni. Quad tho der iungoro fon then themo fater: fater, gib mir teil thero hehti thiu mir gibure.*
 ‘And He said, “A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’
 ‘Und er sprach: Ein Mensch hatte zwei Söhne. Und der jüngste unter ihnen sprach zu dem Vater: Gib mir, Vater, das Teil der Güter, das mir gehört.’

Old English syntax was still typically Germanic. For example, the default word order in the main clause was verb second (*V2 Wortfolge*), as in (3), and verb final in the subordinate clause as in Modern German and the complex verb phrase was split into the brace construction (*Satzklammer, Satzrahmen*) as in (4):

- (3) *On þisum geare com Anlaf and Swegen to Lundenbyrig. (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 994)*
 ‘In this year Anlaf and Sweyn came to London.’
 (4) *Eastengle hæfdon Ælfrede cyninge apas geseald. (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle 893)*
 ‘The East Angles had given King Alfred oaths.’

Like Modern German, Old English distinguished between weak (definite) and strong (indefinite) adjectival declension (CAMPBELL, 1959: 261ff; RESZKIEWICZ, 1973: 132), e.g. *god cyning* ‘a good king’ vs. *se goda cyning* ‘the good king’; cf. *ein guter König* vs. *der gute König*. Early medieval English shared most of the morphological properties with German: similar classification of noun declensions and verb conjugations (strong, *stark* vs. weak, *schwach*). Compare some selected forms in the conjugation of the Old English verb *helpan* with that of Modern German *helfen*, which display the same vocalism owing to the Germanic apophony (*Ablaut*) and the West Germanic mutation (*Umlaut*):

1 The character <þ> was borrowed from the runic alphabet to render the dental fricative consonant, which in the earliest northern texts and then from Early Middle English onwards was transliterated as <th>.

(5)	<i>ic helpe</i>	<i>ich helfe</i>
	<i>þu hilpst</i>	<i>du hilfst</i>
	<i>we helþaþ</i> (subjunctive <i>we helpen</i>)	<i>wir helfen</i>
	<i>ic healþ</i>	<i>ich half</i>
	<i>ic hæbbe geholpen</i>	<i>ich habe geholfen</i>

However, it is natural that we can observe some divergent processes that made continental and insular West Germanic dialects more and more different from each other. Thus, for example, in prehistoric Old English, most likely at the Anglo-Frisian stage, the Proto-Germanic diphthong /ai/ was monophthongized to /a:/, as in **stainas* becoming OE *stān* (> ME *stone*), which accounts for the regular correspondence between Modern English /ou/ and Modern German /a:/ in pairs like *stone/Stein*, *alone/allein*, *home/Heim*, *own/eigen*, *Holy Ghost/Heiliger Geist* and many others. Anglo-Frisian Brightening (or First Fronting) is responsible for short /a/ becoming /æ/, e.g. OE *dæg* 'day' vs. HG *Tag*, *wæter* vs. *Wasser*, *cræft* vs. *Kraft*, etc. (CAMPBELL, 1959: 53; HOGG, 1992: 102).

Another important Anglo-Frisian innovation was the compensatory lengthening of short vowels before the clusters made up from the nasal consonants followed by another consonant. In English and Frisian the nasal was lost, but the preceding vowel was automatically lengthened, as can be seen in such pairs as *uns* vs. *ūs* (*us*), *Gans* vs. *gōs* (*goose*), *ander* vs. *ōðer* (*other*), OHG *fimf* (*fünf*) vs. *fif* (*five*), *Mund* vs. *mūþ* (*mouth*), etc.

The most conspicuous Early Old English consonantal modification was the palatalization of velar consonants in the environment of front vowels. In such contexts Germanic /k, g/ became /j, tʃ, dʒ/, cf. *Eck/edge*, *Fink/finch*, *Brücke/bridge*, *Krücke/crutch*, *Käse/cheese*, *gelb/yellow*, *Regen/rain*, *Nagel/nail*, *Weg/way*, *liegen/lie*, *lügen/lie*, *sagen/say*, and dozens of other examples. After back vowels the phoneme /g/ developed a fricative allophone [ɣ], which in Middle English turned into the semivowel /w/, giving rise to new diphthongs, cf. e.g. *Vogel/fowl*, *Bogen/bow*, *Sorge/sorrow*.

Between the 6th and the 8th centuries also Old High German had its significant change of the consonantal shift known as the Second Consonantal Shift, *zweite (althochdeutsche) Lautverschiebung*; cf. SCHMIDT (1984: 167ff), ROBINSON (1992: 240), which should not be confused with the First Shift (*erste germanische Lautverschiebung*), i.e. Grimm's Law (*Grimms Lautgesetz*), which occurred in Proto-Germanic (*Urgermanisch*), and as a consequence is reflected in all the Germanic languages. The OHG shift affected only central and southern dialects and its results are absent in the North, e.g. in Plattdeutsch (Low German, continuation of Old Saxon, *Altsächsisch*), as we can see in the map of the Dutch-German speaking area of the 19th century:



Fig. 2. The borders of the Second Consonantal Shift

Source: BLOOMFIELD, 1933: 344.

As a result of this process (now standard) High German (*Hochdeutsch*) has different consonants than all the other Germanic languages: Germanic *p*, *t*, *k*, *d* became in High German *pf*, *ts* <*z*>, *ch*, *t*. However, *p* and *t* respectively became *ff* and *ss* in the postvocalic position. Witness the following examples: *apple*/*Apfel*, *pound*/*Pfund*, *shape*/*schaffen*, *pepper*/*Pfeffer*, *up*/*auf*, *tongue*/*Zunge*, *ten*/*zehn*, *to*/*zu*, *tame*/*zahn*, *better*/*besser*, *hate*/*Haß*, *foot*/*Fuß*; *make*/*machen*, *cook*/*Koch*, *book*/*Buch*, *seek*/*suchen*, *drink*/*trinken*, *door*/*Tür*, *drive*/*treiben*, *rider*/*Ritter*, *do*/*tun*, *word*/*Wort*.²

Also fricatives developed differently: while in German the voiced bilabial fricative /β/ changed its manner of articulation and became the plosive /b/, in English the place of articulation shifted to the labiovelar position of /v/; cf. e.g. *haben*/*have*, *Leber*/*liver*, *über*/*over*, *Liebe*/*love*, *Taube*/*dove*, *sieben*/*seven*. The Proto-Germanic dental fricative /θ/ became the dental plosive in German, as, for example, in *think*/*denken*, *brother*/*Bruder*, *that*/*das*, *path*/*Pfad*, *thin*/*dünn*, *thick*/*dick*, *earth*/*Erde*, *oath*/*Eid*.

Later Medieval English quantitative and qualitative changes contributed to further differences, e.g. in the 11th century short vowels were lengthened before homorganic consonant clusters (cf. FISIÁK, 1968: 26ff; WEŁNA, 1978: 35ff), e.g. in *lang*, *ald*, which turned into *lāng*, *āld*. Then long *ā* was raised to *ō* in southern English dialects, which yielded *long*, *old* differing from their German cognates *lang*, *alt*. In the 12th century vowels were lengthened in the open syllables of disyllabic words, e.g. *make*(*n*)>*māke*(*n*), *hope*(*n*)>*hōpe*(*n*) vs. German *machen*, *hoffen*.

² Low German (*Plattdeutsch*) dialects will have the same consonants as English; compare the following examples of contrasting pairs of High German and Low German words: *Apfel*/*Appel*, *Schiff*/*Schipp*, *essen*/*eten*, *sitzen*/*sitten*, *zehn*/*tiehn*, *zwei*/*rwei*, *machen*/*maken*, *Tag*/*Dag*.

Then between 1350–1500 the English language experienced the fundamental change of the quality of long vowels, known as the Great Vowel Shift, whereby all the seven long vowels were raised and/or diphthongized. The process is responsible for the major discrepancies between Modern English conservative spelling (reflecting the medieval sounds) and pronunciation, marking English vowels off their continental counterparts, including German; cf. e.g. *ich/I*, *finden/find*, *See/sea*, *Name/name*, *Blut/blood*, *Kuh/cow*, *(ge)finden/found*. In Middle High German (*Mittelhochdeutsch*) some long vowels were diphthongized while some diphthongs became long vowels, e.g. *ie>ī*, *uo>ū*; cf. SCHMIDT (1984: 282ff). Thus English and German vocalisms went even further apart.

Knowing the divergent phonetic processes discussed above, one can easily account for the different phonetic shape of the cognate English and German words, which no longer look and/or sound similar, e.g. *oak/Eiche*, *token/Zeichen*, *ape/Affe*, *day/Tag*, *that/das*, *tile/Ziegel*, *deep/tief*, *plow/Pflug*, *draw/tragen*, *eat/essen*, *let/lassen*, *rainbow/Regenbogen*, *plant/Pflanze*, *toe/Zehe*, *saw/Säge*, *shit/Scheiß* and hundreds of other cognates. Sometimes phonetic discrepancies are accompanied by semantic shifts, e.g. *klein/clean*, *pflügen/play*, *zahlen/tell*, *Bein/bone*, *laufen/leap*, *Knecht/knight*, *Tier/deer*, *Zeit/tide*, *Kopf/cup*.

Unlike other Indo-European languages, Proto-Germanic developed strong dynamic stress falling on the root syllable and this kind of prosody resulted in Germanic becoming a stress-timed language. Cross-linguistic typological studies show that in such languages unstressed syllables tend to undergo weakening and are often dropped altogether, gradually making words shorter and shorter. This can be seen in the diachronic development of all Germanic languages, but in English the process of reducing unstressed syllables has been most advanced, which is usually explained by the multilingual situation of medieval Britain, where English was used alongside Scandinavian Norse, Norman French and several Celtic languages. As a result of such acceleration numerous English words were shortened to just the root syllable, e.g. verbs lost the infinitive ending *-en* (cf. *trinken/drink*, *bringen/bring*, *haben/have*, etc.), past participles dropped the prefix *ge-* (cf. *gekommen* vs. *gecumen>icumen>come*) and many nouns lost their unstressed syllables by the end of the 15th century in all dialects of Middle English (cf. *Katze/catte>cat*, *Tropfen/dropa>drop*, *Leben/life*).

This phenomenon had even more significant consequences for Middle English inflectional morphology, as by 1500 most contrasts had been levelled in English, resulting in the loss of morphological cases and gender distinctions in the declension of nouns and adjectives. Modern German still has four cases, while Modern English makes use of just one common case and only animate nouns have the *s*-genitive (the Saxon genitive). Unlike German and medieval English, Modern English is characterized by the natural (semantic) noun gender. Towards the end of the 15th century the strong masculine plural ending *-(e)s* (from OE *-as*) was generalized to all nouns regardless of their morphological affiliation in Old English,

e.g. *scipu*>*scips*, *sorga*>*sorrows*, *beech*>*books*, *modra*>*mothers*, *lambru*>*lambs*, whereas the strong masculine plural ending *-as* lost the final consonant and became *-ā* in Old High German, later *-e* (cf. *dagas* vs. *tage*, *wulfas* vs. *wolfē*, etc.). In Old Saxon the ending was *-os* (*dagos*, *wulfos*) (cf. PROKOSCH, 1939: 241).

Only few English nouns adopted the weak ending *-en*, now present only in *oxen*, *children* and *brethren*, which in turn appears to be the most common plural marker in German, now added to many nouns which did not belong to the weak declension in medieval German, e.g. *Sünden*, *Sachen* (cf. SCHMIDT, 1984: 191ff, 241ff, 312ff; SZULC, 1991: 147, 195). Similarly plural *-er* was attached to many nouns which did not have it in *Althochdeutsch*, e.g. *Kinder*. And while Modern English has preserved only six unlauded noun plurals (*men*, *women*, *geese*, *feet*, *teeth*, *mice*, *lice*), German extended the phenomenon to numerous nouns without any genetic justification, e.g. *Wölfe*, *Füchse*. In some German nouns both devices are combined to make the new plural, e.g. OHG *haus*, *wort*, *lant* vs. modern *Häuser*, *Wörter*, *Länder*.

The natural consequence of the loss of inflection was the typological shift of English from the class of synthetic languages to the analytic ones, characterized by the fixed word order. By 1500 English had become a consistent SVO language in both main and subordinate clauses. The Germanic *Satzklammer* or brace construction (6a) was replaced by the pattern where the auxiliary and the main verb have to be juxtaposed, as in the modern translation of the sentence under (6b):

- (6a) *Ic sceal para oxena binne mid hiege afillan.* (Ælfric's *Colloquy* 16)
 (6b) I shall fill the oxen's bin with hay.

In addition, the auxiliary *have* is generalized also to intransitive verb, so for earlier *she is come in* (as in the famous medieval song *Sumer is iycumen in*), *they were arrived*, after 1500 we have *she has come in*, *they had arrived*. In German the auxiliary *sein* is still obligatory for intransitive verbs: *sie ist gekommen*, **sie hat gekommen*.

Old English developed its own subordinating conjunctions, most likely after the arrival of Anglo-Saxons in Britain. For example, all the continental West Germanic languages (Old Dutch, Old Frisian, Old Low German, Old High German) used various forms of the causal subordinator (*bithiu*) *wanta*,³ which is absent even in the most archaic English texts. Instead of it, Old English used the conjunction *for-þon* (*þe*) translated literally as 'for-this that', thus congruent with Polish *dla-tego że* and French *par-ce que*, which in the late Middle Ages gave way to *because*; cf. MOLENCKI (2012). Compare, for example, the Old High German and Old English version of Luke 1.7:

- (7a) *Inti ni uuard in sun, bithiu uuanta Elisabeth uuas unberenti.* (*Tatian* II.2 (Luke 1.7))

3 In Early Modern German (*Frühneuhochdeutsch*) *wanta* was replaced with *weil*; cf. LOCKWOOD (1968: 241) and especially SELTING (1999).

- (7b) *And hig næfdon nan bearn, forðam ðe Elizabeth wæs unberende West Saxon Gospels*
 ‘And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren.’

Like the nominal and adjectival declensions, the verb conjugation was largely simplified after the loss of endings which had originally indicated the category of person. By 1500 a typical verb had the present forms as in (8a), but after the loss of the second person singular pronoun *thou* in the 17th century the present stage is reached by 1700, as shown in (8b):

- (8a) *I help, thou helpst, he helpeth/helps* and the plural *we/ye/they help*
 (8b) *I help, you help, he helps* and the plural *we/you/they help*

All the verbs that were borrowed from French automatically became weak, forming their past forms by means of the suffix *-ed* (*arrive/arrived, commence/commenced, prefer/preferred*, etc.), making the weak pattern dominant. Strong verbs became irregular exceptions and some of the originally strong native verbs went over to the weak (now regular) class, e.g. instead of earlier forms *clamb, healp, fleow* we now have *climbed, helped, flowed*.

The far-reaching simplification of morphology was, however, accompanied by the rapid development of new periphrastic forms expressing tense, aspect and modality. Some perfective forms were already used in medieval English (*have done, had given, is come*) but the development of progressive forms between 1400 and 1800 (auxiliary *be* + present participle) was an English novelty which has no parallel in other Germanic languages (*is writing, was waiting, has been doing, had been drinking, is being built*, etc.). Except for some fixed phrases the morphological subjunctive was lost in Early Modern English, being replaced with the periphrastic form made up from the modal auxiliary (especially *would* and *should*) and the infinitive. The obligatorification of the auxiliary *do* in questions and negations (*Do you speak English? He did not see me*) in the late 17th century made the English conjugation even more different from its German counterpart.

Originally Old English was a pure Germanic language with very few loanwords from other languages. Many Old English words, later lost, are similar to German words, e.g. *gesceaft/Geschäft* ‘creation, business’, *scyld/Schuld* ‘guilt’, *earn⁴/arm* ‘poor’, *here/Heer* ‘army’, *gemæn/gemein* ‘common’, *ar/Ehre* ‘honour’, *lyft/Luft* ‘air’, *stund/Stunde* ‘hour’. After Vikings began to settle in England (9th–11th centuries), many simple English words of West Germanic origin were replaced with their

4 The diphthong *ea* in English is the result of the Anglo-Saxon breaking (c. 5th–6th century); cf. BRUNNER and SIEVERS (1942: 52): “unter Brechung verstand J. Grimm allgemein den Übergang eines kurzen *ē* in *eo*, *a* in *ea*”; cf. parallel German and Old English examples such as *Herz* vs. *heorte* ‘heart’, *Stern* vs. *steorra* ‘star’, *fallen* vs. *feallan* ‘fall’, *acht* vs. *eahta* ‘eight’.

Norse cognates. Thus *sweostor* (like *Schwester*) gave way to *sister*, *ey* (*Ei*) to *egg*, *ni-men* (*nehmen*) to *take(n)*, etc.

When French-speaking Normans were becoming bilingual and later native speakers of English, especially in the 14th century, they introduced about ten thousand French words into their English, quickly making English the least Germanic of all the Germanic languages. The huge influx of Romance vocabulary mostly affected such 'upper-class' spheres of life as government, architecture, art, culture, music, science, fashion. Alongside simple everyday Germanic short words such as *come*, *leave*, *stay*, *get*, *begin*, *hide*, *deep* we now find their more formal and/or abstract Romance equivalents *arrive*, *depart*, *remain*, *receive*, *commence*, *conceal*, *profound*, *respectively*.

However, some of the new words oust the native words altogether, e.g. for OE *leode* (German *Leute*) is replaced by French *people*, *blostm* (*Blume*) by *flower*, *deor* (*Tier*) by *animal*, *earm* (*arm*) by *poor*, *gebed* (*Gebet*) by *prayer*, *lyft* (*Luft*) by *air*. The presence of so many French words in English is in marked contrast with German, a relatively pure Germanic language, which still prefers native words to internationalisms, e.g. *Fernsehen* for *television*, *allgemein* for *general*, *Geschichte* for *history*, *Erkunde* alongside *Geographie*.

Despite having been flooded with Romance words, English managed to preserve its Germanic character. After all, 90 per cent of high frequency words in English are of Germanic origin, often very similar to their German cognates: most grammatical words (e.g. *and*, *under*, *over*, *before*), verbs denoting basic activities (e.g. *eat*, *drink*, *sleep*, *give*, *go*, *come*), most common adjectives (*good*, *high*, *long*, *old*), including colours (*blue*, *green*, *red*, *yellow*, *brown*, *white*) and many nouns (*man*, *bread*, *sun*, *rain*, *beer*).

English borrowed quite a few words from German, also when German immigrants introduced them to American English, especially in the field of food and drink, but not only, e.g. *hamburger*, *frankfurter*, *wurst*, *sauerkraut*, *kindergarten*, *blitz(krieg)*, *dachshund*, *wunderkind*, *leitmotiv*, *umlaut*. German, which for centuries managed to remain a pure language, is now finding it very difficult to resist the influx of English words, like most languages of the world after 1950. Thus *die Klimaanlage* is becoming *die Aircondition*, *die Drogerie* – *der Body-Shop*, *die Stadtmitte* – *die City*, *der Höhepunkt* – *das Highlight*, *arbeiten* – *jobben*, *der Saft* – *der Juice*, *die englische Königin* – *die Queen*, *die Feier* – *die Party*, and dozens of other examples could be listed. Some of these words are pseudo-anglicisms, as they mean something else in English, e.g. what Germans (and after them Poles) call *Smoking* is in fact 'dinner jacket' (British) or 'tuxedo' (American); *Handy* is an adjective synonymous with 'useful' and is never used with reference to 'mobile phones' (British) or 'cellphones' (American). Anyway, after fifteen centuries of separation English and German have come into direct contact again and the increasing number of English words are finding their way back to the continental *Urheimat* of the Anglo-Saxons, including the peninsula of Angeln. The two sisters,

who each went her own way, are having a reunion, though one of them appears to be imposing her way of life on the other.

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