

Wartime Regulation of Language (1942)

Abstract

Prior to World War II, the Nazi government strove to regulate language by implementing strict rules about the use of the “Heil Hitler” greeting and salute, and by controlling what could or could not appear in advertising within the Reich. Controlling language in this way would, in theory, not only help solidify political control, but also contribute to the cultural unity that the Nazis hoped to build. With the onset of war, efforts to regulate language accelerated, as it became even more important for the regime to be able to control and shape the ways in which the war would be conceived and understood by the population. The following regulations, introduced in 1942, established the legal parameters for the use of certain terms and phrases, and for the use of non-German languages in the public sphere. As the first document makes clear, the term “Das Reich” played an important propagandistic role and was to be used only in reference to greater Germany and its territorial acquisitions. “Reich” was not an interchangeable term like “empire.” Meanwhile, the law forbade the use of English in public and in writing, supposedly obviating the propagandistic benefits reaped by Great Britain and the United States by having their national language used by the German public.

Source

Language Regulation for Using the Term “Das Reich” (March 21, 1942)

Under the term “Empire” the British have succeeded in making their national possessions, which are spread across the globe, recognizable to the whole world as a unified state. It must be our endeavor in the future, under the term “das Reich,” to show the new Germany in all her possessions before the world public as a unified state entity. In the future, when other nations are mentioned, the word “Reich” should never be used. There are states and nations, but there is only one Reich and that is Germany.

Source: NSDAP/PK, ed., *Verfügungen, Anordnungen, Bekanntgaben*. Vol. I, Munich, 1943, p. 206; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (in collaboration with Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*. Vol. 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, p. 1178.

Translation: Insa Kummer

Advertising Signs in English on the Street, and in Hotels, Stores, etc. (July 14, 1942)

On the streets, in hotels, stores, etc., signs in the English language, such as “American-Bar,” “Tea-Room,” “English spoken,” or the like, are still to be found in isolated instances. This remaining evidence of misapplied business acumen must gradually disappear [;] provided that the removal of the signs is possible without major expenditure of material and labor. In agreement with the Reich Propaganda Directorate, the local authorities are therefore requested to decide on the removal or retention of such signs, if necessary, in consultation with the local trade and business groups. This suggestion is not intended as a so-called action against foreign words in general usage.

Source: NSDAP/PK, ed., *Verfügungen, Anordnungen, Bekanntgaben*. Vol. II, Munich, 1943, p. 782; reprinted in Bernd Sösemann (with Marius Lange), *Propaganda: Medien und Öffentlichkeit in der NS-Diktatur: eine Dokumentation und Edition von Gesetzen, Führerbefehlen und sonstigen Anordnungen sowie propagandistischen Bild- und Textüberlieferungen im kommunikationshistorischen Kontext und in der Wahrnehmung des Publikums*. Vol. 2. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011, p. 1179.

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