

# How gross!

Wie gut übersetzt eigentlich der Computer? Und warum ist eine noch so gute Übersetzung manchmal einfach nicht gut genug? Von *deepl.com* und PETRA DANIELL

ADVANCED



„Was schaust du dir da an?“ „Was ist das denn?“

„Du bist in den Nachrichten.“

„Ein Bericht über das BIP des Staates.“ „Bruttoinlandsprodukt.“

„Was schaust du dir da an?“  
„Einen Bericht über den GAU in Tschernobyl.“

„Was heißt GAU?“  
„Größter anzunehmender Unfall.“

„Du bist im Fernsehen.“

- On this page, we generally use free online software to translate excerpts from German texts into English. Over the past year, the results have sometimes been surprisingly good, sometimes barely comprehensible. We looked at typical, recurring mistakes related to grammar, sentence structure and lexical choices, but also at the more general limitations of computer translations.
- What it comes down to is this: human translators take cultural background and general knowledge into account and think for themselves. Software doesn't. That is why, as we have seen, even a very good computer translation can completely miss the point.
- Take the cartoon above as an example. We had the speech balloons

translated by DeepL translator, a program we found to be miles ahead of its competitors. Indeed, the translation is fine — even though, if you wanted to be picky, you could argue that an accusative should have been used in the second sentence (einen Bericht).

- However, the English dialogue plays on the compound “gross domestic product” (Bruttoinlandsprodukt) and its individual components “gross” (eklig, widerlich), “domestic” (häuslich, Familien-) and “product” (in the sense of Erzeugnis). The little girl takes the financial term literally and comes to the conclusion that the report must be about her younger brother.
- The German translation *Bruttoinlandsprodukt*, unfortunately, cannot

possibly be used to describe a disgusting brother. The joke is lost in translation, therefore, and the cartoon would leave readers confused rather than laughing.

- This is when the work of the human translator starts — when you turn the computer off, let the text stew for a while, talk to colleagues and start bouncing ideas around. This is when the dictionaries are pushed aside and the brainstorming begins.
- What other topics could be talked about on television? What other (possibly negative) abbreviations might be mentioned? Which of their elements could be used in connection with children?
- Have a look at what we came up with, and see what you think.

## abbreviation

[əˈbrɪːviːʃən]

- Abkürzung

## account: take sth. into ~

[əˈkaʊnt]

- etw. berücksichtigen

## barely

[ˈbeəli]

- kaum

## bounce: ~ around

[baʊns]

- herumstoßen; hier: mit etw. jonglieren

## compound

[ˈkɒmpaʊnd]

- Wortverbindung

## excerpt

[ˈeksɜːpt]

- Auszug

## literally

[ˈlɪtərəli]

- wörtlich

## miss the point

[ˌmɪs ðə ˈpɔɪnt]

- am Thema vorbeigehen

## picky

[ˈpɪki] ifml.

- pingelig

## rather than

[ˈrɑːðə ðæn]

- anstatt

## recurring

[rɪˈkɜːrɪŋ]

- sich wiederholend

## speech balloon

[ˈspiːtʃ ˈbælʊn]

- Sprechblase

## stew

[stjuː]

- schmoren