

German 'terror' at cheek pecks

Allan Hall

The Age, Thursday, August 11, 2011

[Comments 6](#)

A German etiquette group has called for a ban on work colleagues kissing one another in the office saying the peck on the cheek is a form of "terrorism".

The German Knigge Society - knigge translates as etiquette or correct behaviour - says the practice has flourished in offices in recent years.

Women kiss women, men kiss women, usually once, sometimes twice in the way of the French. In a society with rules more rigorous than most, sensibilities have become deeply offended.

Seeing as how Germans can go their whole working lives referring to the person next to them in the formal "Sie" instead of "du", a kiss has become something of a threat to the accepted order of things.

At school they are taught to keep a respectful distance when greeting a stranger, to shake their hand and to bow the head ever so slightly. Not for them the high fives of Wall Street, dress-down Fridays and group therapy hugs.

Now the Knigge Society has ruled on the vexed issue of office kissing and says it must go. It says it has reacted to many callers who have inquired over recent months about what to do if someone should attempt to kiss them in a greeting.

Hans-Michael Klein, chairman of the group, said: "This is valid immediately. There should be no kissing, at least not in the office."

In an attempt to show he was not living in another century, or in another galaxy, Herr Klein said inquiries had flooded into his offices from such varied cities as Berlin, Munich and Dusseldorf.

"The suspicion for many remains that there is, or may be, an erotic component to the kissing," he said. "Kissing simply gets on the nerves of many at work. It is a form of terror."

"In business the handshake is considered the correct greeting ritual."

<http://www.theage.com.au/world/german-terror-at-cheek-pecks-20110810-1imqa.html>

Comments left on the website of *The Age*

1. So they want to throw cold water on their countrymen that would seem to be happy, warm and friendly kiss-givers. Personally id rather have an office full of kiss-greeters than one full of back-stabbers.

I have been greeted with a kiss once at work by a long-standing male colleague. It did take me back for about a millisecond. Once the ultra-brief shock wore off I felt a flood of warmth and kind regard for my expressive friend. Everyone in the world needs to lighten up.

tba / *tolc* - August 11, 2011, 12:31PM

2. I deplore the increasing use of hugging and kissing when greeting people in Australia. I don't know where it came from, but we never used to do it. I don't want to hug and kiss people and I cannot see why I should. Likening it to terrorism isn't far off the mark, actually.

ant / *Rural NSW* - August 11, 2011, 1:02PM

3. The work-place kiss is totally inappropriate. A firm handshake for all (men and women, and not just the VIPs) is the way to go.

4. What's next, the Ashley Schaeffer crotch grab?

Nasty Cyril / *Melbourne* - August 11, 2011, 1:02PM

5. So is it correct to remove my Managers pants before I kiss his cheek?..... Confused.

Rusty Strodes / *Mooroolbark* - August 11, 2011, 1:04PM

6. Interesting... I work for a German company, and EVERYONE kisses me when I go over on a business trip, from the owner and managers of the company down to the factory workers. Not on a day to day basis, but certainly on first arrival and when returning home. I have assumed its very normal behaviour for all Europeans.

warriorprincess / *Sydney* - August 11, 2011, 3:01PM

7. Can all the touchy, kissy people please stick together and leave the rest of us alone at work please. It is far worse to be kissed if you don't especially like air kissing than it is to not be kissed if you do happen like air kissing.

I don't care if you brand me a prude or an ice block. It is just a personal choice that should be respected.....

Smooch-free / *Sydney* - August 11, 2011, 3:06PM

Read more: <http://www.theage.com.au/world/german-terror-at-cheek-pecks-20110810-1imqa.html#ixzz1UIZGHK00>

Wollen wir duzen?

To kiss or not to kiss, that is the question.

Begin by asking students if there are any rules about kissing?

Die Prinzen song *Küssen verboten* could be used to start students thinking about the topic.

Intercultural Language Skills

Get them thinking with a Think – Pair – Share activity.

- Students read the article themselves and think about the questions.
- Students discuss their answers in pairs.
- Students share ideas with the class.

1. Think-Pair-Share

Read the article: *German 'terror' at cheek pecks.*

- a) What is the problem at work?
- b) Who is complaining?

Read the opinions submitted to The Age.

- a) Are they in agreement with the reporter?
- b) What do you think about this?
- c) Is there a difference between personal relationships at work and in private life?

2. Re-read this extract from the article:

...Women kiss women, men kiss women, usually once, sometimes twice in the way of the French. In a society with rules more rigorous than most, sensibilities have become deeply offended...

- a) Does the author agree with the Knigge Society? How can you tell?
- b) What assumptions are being made about cultural behaviour in Germany?
- b) What are the 'rules' about kissing in Australia? Are they the same for everyone?

3. Re-read a further extract:

...Seeing as how Germans can go their whole working lives referring to the person next to them in the formal "Sie" instead of "du", a kiss has become something of a threat to the accepted order of things...

- a) What opinion does the reporter believe the use of 'Sie' and 'du' means in German?
- b) What particular world view is the reporter imposing on another language and culture?

4. Focus on language

'**Sie**' = you in the formal form (singular and plural)

'**du**' (ou - singular) is the familiar form and '**ihr**' (you - plural) is the familiar form

Which pronoun used for 'you' will depend on the number and relationships between the speakers being addressed i.e. which register is used.

- a) What is meant by 'formal' when talking about languages?
- b) How do you understand the difference in use of the formal and familiar form in German?
- c) How do we make distinctions between formal and informal language in English?
- d) Does the reporter understand the standard use of the formal or familiar forms in German?

Andere Länder – Andere Sitten

An idea for an Intercultural Project

Context

Your class is participating in an exchange to Germany. The German students are arriving first. Your teacher has asked you to prepare advice for the German students to help them understand what to expect when they arrive in Australia.

If your class has a sister-school program, the German students could be asked to do the same for the Australian students.

Task

Prepare a presentation on the rules of behaviour with respect to greeting people.

Presentations could be a pamphlet, PPT, Vodcast, Podcast, WIKI or combination of these. If you have another idea, discuss this with your teacher.

Ideas to Consider

What is said when meeting people and taking your leave?

What gestures are expected, if any?

Who is allowed to kiss who? When is it NOT ok to kiss someone?

Do the rules change in different circumstances?

- a) Your family
- b) Your friends at school
- c) Your friends out of school
- d) Your workplace (if you have a part-time job)
- e) Other

Andere Länder – Andere Sitten

The article is a good example of the need for intercultural language skills. It highlights:

- Intercultural misunderstanding of how the language is used of German

Those who speak German as a first language or are familiar with the use of the formal and familiar form as a way of marking a difference between public /working and private life understand that there is nothing 'personal' about making these distinctions.

- Tensions between different cultures and within the Australian community

The author infuses the report with his personal world view and judgement of the behaviour in Germany, as well as his decision that Germany is more bound by rules than other cultures

The people commenting demonstrate the variety of opinions towards kissing and of the different experience of the German culture.

Research Similarities and Differences

Check out the Knigge site for suggested etiquette: <http://www.knigge.de/themen-200.htm>

Die Prinzen

Küssen verboten

Du willst mich haben
denn du findest mich schön
ich muß sagen
das kann ich gut verstehn
Du machst Geschenke
und wäschst bei mir ab
Und ich denke
daß ich's gut bei dir hab
Doch da gibt es eine Sache, die ich gar nicht leiden
kann,
kommen deine feuchten Lippen zu nah an mich ran.

Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Streng verboten
Keiner, der mich je gesehn hat, hätte das geglaubt
Küssen ist bei mir nicht erlaubt.

Schon in der Schule
ich war sieben Jahre alt
Da war die Jule
in mich total verknallt
Ging ich nach Hause
kam sie hinter mir her
Und in der Pause
wollte sie noch viel mehr.
Sie dachte, daß sie mich mit Käsebrötchen kaufen
kann
und dann kamen ihre feuchten Lippen an mich ran.

Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Streng verboten
Keiner, der mich je gesehn hat, hätte das
geglaubt
Küssen ist bei mir nicht erlaubt.

Und letzte Nacht im Traum
Tobias kam zur Tür herein
Ich sah große feuchte Lippen
Und ich konnte nur noch schrein
AAAHHHH

Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Küssen verboten
Streng verboten
Keiner, der mich je gesehn hat, hätte das
geglaubt
Küssen ist bei mir nicht erlaubt.