

Eigenschaften der deutschen Sprache

(Characteristics of the German language)

- I. German and English are both West Germanic languages and thus have many similarities in terms of vocabulary and grammar. This means that you will understand the meaning of many German words the first time you see them:
Finger, Hand, Arm, Haus, Maus, singen, bringen, trinken
- II. All nouns are capitalized in German, regardless of their "importance":
Die Katze ist auf dem Stuhl. The (C)at is on the (C)hair.
- III. All German nouns have one of three different genders: masculine (*der*), feminine (*die*), or neuter (*das*). Nouns referring to people usually have the "natural" gender:
der Mann the man *die Frau* the woman
der Sohn the son *die Tochter* the daughter
Nouns referring to inanimate objects do not follow any "logical" patterns of gender:
der Löffel the spoon *die Gabel* the fork *das Messer* the knife
The gender of a noun must therefore be memorized along with the noun itself.
(Older forms of English also had grammatical gender, but this feature has completely disappeared in Modern English)
- IV. German has many different ways of making a word plural, unlike in English:
das Buch--»die Bücher the book--»the books
das Fenster--»die Fenster the window--»the windows
der Tisch--»die Tische the table--»the tables
die Tochter--»die Töchter the daughter--»the daughters
The plural of a noun must also be memorized in addition to its gender.
In class I will always indicate both the gender of a noun as well as its plural with a kind of shorthand:
s Buch (-`er) = das Buch--»die Bücher
r Sohn (-`e) = der Sohn--»die Söhne
The definite article for all plural nouns is *die*.
- V. In German, all numbers (when written out) are always written as one word, regardless of length:
zwei two *fünfzehn* fifteen
fünfhundertdreiundzwanzigtausendachthundertsechsvierzig
five hundred twenty-three thousand eight hundred sixty-four
- VI. German frequently uses compound nouns which may look daunting at first, but the more German you learn, the more you will appreciate them:
Hochgeschwindigkeitsinternetverbindung High-speed internet connection
Donaudampfschiffahrtselektrizitätenhauptbetriebswerkbauunterbeamtengesellschaft
Association for subordinate officials of the head office management of the Danube steamboat electrical services

- VII. Many German words have an “Umlaut” (Ää, Öö, Üü) which changes the pronunciation and is vital for correct speech and comprehension:

<i>schon</i>	already	<i>schön</i>	beautiful
<i>hatte</i>	had	<i>hätte</i>	would have
<i>schwul</i>	gay/homosexual	<i>schwül</i>	muggy/humid

- VIII. German makes much more frequent use of German/Germanic vocabulary than English when expressing more complex concepts. In English, the basic concept is usually an English/Germanic word whereas the more complex concepts relating to the basic concept are ultimately derived from French, Latin, or Greek:

leben	to live (English/Germanic)
überleben	to survive (Latin via French)
erleben	to experience (Latin via French)
(un)belebt	(in)animate (Latin)
wiederbeleben	to resuscitate (Latin)
lebensvoll	vigorous (Latin via French)
Lebenslauf	curriculum vitae (Latin)/résumé (French)

- IX. German has a case system (grammatical case—nothing to do with upper or lowercase!) which means that articles, adjectives, nouns, and pronouns will change their form depending on what their function is in a sentence, *i.e.* subject, direct object, indirect object, possession:

Der Hund ist groß. The dog is big/large.

Ich sehe den großen Hund. I see the big/large dog.

Der has changed to *den* and *groß* has changed to *großen*. We will learn more about this as the semester progresses.

- X. German spelling is much more consistent than English spelling, meaning that you will be able to correctly pronounce words you see for the first time (unlike in English). Silent letters are very rare!

chauvinism (French)	psychology, pseudo (Greek)	sword (English/Germanic)
could, would	here, there	

- XI. All German-speaking countries use the metric system, which will also be used exclusively in this class. If you have not already done so, please familiarize yourself with the metric system.

das Kilo(gramm) the kilo(gram)≈2.2046 pounds

der/das Meter the meter≈3.2808 feet

der Kilometer the kilometer≈0.6214 miles

- XII. German uses a comma where English uses a period and vice versa:

$3 \div 2 = 1,5$ $3 \div 2 = 1.5$

$500 \times 2 = 1.000$ $500 \times 2 = 1,000$

- XIII. There are many different dialects and varieties of the German language in all German-speaking countries and not all of them are mutually intelligible. The three main varieties are:

<i>Hochdeutsch</i>	Standard/High German
<i>Österreichisches Deutsch</i>	Austrian German

Schweizerdeutsch

Swiss German

This class will focus on *Hochdeutsch* and, to a lesser extent, *österreichisches Deutsch*.

- XIV. German has many more irregular (“strong”) verbs than English. Just because two verbs rhyme does not mean that they are conjugated the same, which is also true of English:

laufen-läuft-lief-gelaufen

to run-runs-ran-ran

saufen-säuft-soff-gesoffen

to booze-booze-booze-booze

to sink-sinks-sank-sunk

to think-thinks-thought-thought

- XV. German writes the date differently from American English:

21.05.1988

05/21/1988

“der einundzwanzigste Mai, 1988/

“May twenty-first, 1988/

der einundzwanzigste fünfte, 1988“

the twenty-first of May, 1988“

- XVI. German write the time differently from American English:

10.30

17.15

10:30 a.m.

5:15 p.m.

In handwriting, the minutes are written in superscript:

10³⁰

17¹⁵

A short side note

German-speaking countries have much colder climates than the American Southwest. German/Austrian/Swiss winters are comparable to those in northern Michigan and temperatures of -20°C (-4°F) are not uncommon during the winter months.