

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ENGLISH AND
GERMAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract. This article discusses the English and German languages comparatively. They are fundamentally and historically different despite being part of the same Germanic branch of the Indo-European languages. Each has its own grammar system and vocabularies and approaches pronunciation in its own unique way.

In this article, the author provides an overview of the common elements of the languages and accounts for structural differences and divergence in the development of the languages historically. The goal of the article is to highlight the relationship between English and German to the reader, showing that understanding one can facilitate the learning of the other.

Currently, English and German are two of the most powerful and commonly used languages in the world today. Their commonality can be tracked through shared historical roots and similarities between the core vocabulary and grammar of these two languages (however, a difference in culture, migration and the amount of time each language has had to grow apart has equalized the correlation).

Alphabet

Both English and German use the Latin alphabet, which makes German one of the more attainable alphabetic scripts for English-speaking learners to master in a second language in regard to reading and pronunciation. Because of the cross-over in the use of the letters in the two languages, students are able to begin the process of learning to read and decode words in German very early in the learning process, which makes learning the written form of German relatively easy. The similarity in the alphabet in regard to the consonants and vowels makes students feel a sense of familiarity or "home" in a new script.

In addition to the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet, the German language uses a set of letters that are not found in English. These include the vowels "ä," "ö," "ü," and "ß" (Eszett or Sharp S) that have an umlaut, or a mark that looks like a diaeresis but is positioned above the vowel. "ä" stands for "a" in "apple," "ö" for "o" in "go," and "ü" for "u" in "put." These vowels with an umlaut represent sounds that differ from the pronunciation of the corresponding vowels without an umlaut. On the other hand, "ß" stands for the sound of "ss" found in a syllable following a vowel, particularly after vowels with a long pronunciation, such as at the end of vowels or diphthongs. Examples of this are found in For example, since the English alphabet does not have either the umlaut vowels or the letter ß, the beginning experience with these letters provides a divergent pattern from the English speaking system. Therefore, the beginning period may pose difficulty to the learners who come from the English-speaking culture. However, the combination of the new letters automates a new level that enables the mastery of German.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is an area where the link between German and English is especially pronounced. Many of the common usage of words are derived from a similar root - this is known as cognate - and many are also very similar in both languages (e.g., father - Vater,



house - Haus, water - Wasser, and name - Name). Words that have cognates allow learners to learn quickly since they recognize the meanings of words immediately, rather than constantly checking the meaning

of the word in the dictionary. Consequently, cognates are an important means for increasing comprehension and confidence of the learner during the early stages of language acquisition. Despite the many similarities between the vocabulary

of the two languages there are also a number of distinct differences within the vocabulary. The most likely cause of confusion in communication between the two languages occurs in the presence of "false friends." A false friend occurs in a word in another language which resembles in spelling or pronunciation a word in the other language but has different meanings. For example, in German, Gift means "poison," not "present," which confuses those who only concentrate

on the spelling. From this, it can be observed that even languages which relate to each other develop their own meanings in their own distinct ways. As a result, while cognates are very helpful for language learners, they require great attention, and superficial resemblances can create misinterpretations.

German Compound Words

German allows the combination of morphemes to create highly specific words. For example, Müllautohintendraufsteher, which is originally "garbage-car-back-on-top-stander," jokes about a garbage collector, today commonly known as trash man, who stands on the back of the garbage trucks to manage the trash on top of the vehicles. It is then not clear whether the word is one or is the sum of the individual parts, but since German considers it to be written as the same word, its meaning is known, thus it is one word, though the freedom of compound word formation offers the chance to create an infinite number of words with the same procedure, an enormously high number that will virtually be infinite since there is no way to list an infinite number of words that will not be infinite themselves anyway since everyone will be unique, unlike the case of the English language, which considers the phrase "a guy standing on the back of the garbage truck" to describe the concept, thus offering an entirely new word different from the German word since the word is not one but rather is the sum of separate words, thus offering an altogether unique word that will be counted individually, hence will result in German having.

Multiple Meanings (Homonyms): when a single word possesses more than one meaning, should we take it into account just once or consider it as many times as its meanings? Such as, German Schloss means "lock" and also "castle" – two different meanings at all. English ring could refer to a jewel or the ringing of a phone. The homonyms are identical in spelling. Hence, should Schloss be considered a single word or as two different ones? In the same way, is it correct to treat polysemes – words with related meanings (like "head" of a person vs "head" of an organisation) – as one or two? Lexicographers should resolve the issue of whether to list these meanings under one entry or different ones.

Grammar

There emerge grammatical differences between German and English due to differing inflection and grammatical rule structures. English has lower inflectional usage and grammatical rules than German, and such differences in grammar have caused some notable disparities in grammar between both languages. A lot of syntactic features, or how words are put together to form sentences, come with different case structures between them; but then again not all cases function the same way in either of the two languages to make a translation for the same sentence.

The first key to getting a hold of this aspect of grammar is to realize that the gender assigned to nouns determines the word order, providing different sentences. Nouns are all of one of three genders. German nouns have



3 grammatical genders: Masculine, feminine and neuter. Also the noun's form might be affected by its grammatical case, or the function and position it holds in relation to other parts of speech. Nouns in German have four cases: nominative, accusative, dative and genitive.

For instance, *der Mann* is a nominative noun when he shows up as the subject of a sentence; whereas *den Mann* is that same noun meaning exactly the same thing, but in an accusative case. In German nouns not only change their spelling according from the case; cases also influence how articles and adjectives are spelled when they accompany a noun. Now, a great deal of care must be taken when putting together words with our nouns, adjectives and articles if we wish to achieve correct German sentence structure.

In comparison, English has no gender system for nouns. English nouns don't require case endings either; actually, the majority of English nouns bear no change when put into the accusative or genitive.

Pronunciation

German has by far a more regular and predictable pronunciation system than English. As for pronunciation, in general German words are spoken just like they're written giving learners the ability to sound things out based on spelling. From there, once you know how phonetic rules work, reading new words because so much easier. This consistency is in stark comparison with English, which even native speakers struggle to pronounce correctly. It's also a common concern for English speakers to be unable to identify which pronunciation rules are applicable to any particular word. The English language provides many instances of inconsistency. "Words like "for", "though", "through" and "thought" have some similar spelling but are totally different in their phonics. These exceptions are what make English pronunciation infamously hard for learners, since much of it is learned through specific instances instead of rules. A sequence of letters may be pronounced differently depending on etymology, historical changes, loanwords and local features. In comparison, the pronunciation rules of German are quite clear and straightforward. "Father," for instance, is just about the only thing in English that sounds remotely like "Vater" to someone acquiring both languages. But in terms of German phonetics, it is pronounced with an "f" sound. In an academic context, the set of rules that regulate the pronunciation of the German language shows consistency in the entire lexicon. Once learned, the system can be generally applied to a large number of words. German orthography also shows correspondence in the pronunciation of the consonant clusters *ch*, *z*, and *w* to emphasize the phonetic transparency in the German language. Another significant functional difference in the English and German systems involves stress and pitch patterns. The English language makes extensive use of stress patterns to produce meaning contrasts, where a single word can function as a noun or verb based on stress patterns, as in the words *record* and *present*. In English, pitch can indicate an affect, an emphasis, or even grammatical contrasts in statements and questions. Therefore, the learner has to focus on both segmental elements and prosodic patterns in English. On the other hand, the German language stresses its words in a relatively systematic way. To a significant extent, the stress in the vast majority of native German words is determined by the fact that the stress has to be placed on the first syllable. Certainly, exceptions to this rule do apply, but these exceptions pertain largely to loan words and separable prefixes. Interestingly, the pattern in German prosody is less emotive than English prosody. Taken together, these points illustrate a paradox in which, while German is a language that prioritizes regularity and rule-based pronunciation, English is a language that has a lot of borrowings in its past and is still undergoing phonological changes. For a student, doing German pronunciation



might not be very different from what is expected in other languages, but when it comes to English, one has to be flexible and memorize a lot of words.

Conclusion

In summary, the English and German languages both evolved separately and developed independently, but they share an identical origin from the same Germanic group of languages that are branches of the larger Indo-European language family (due to their historical connection). Therefore, while a great deal of the English language has been influenced by other languages such as French and Latin, resultant changes in spelling and pronunciation of words can be rather complicated. In addition, one of the advantages of being a native German speaker is that German phonetics make pronunciation more predictable since most spelling follows a systematic rule. Furthermore, the differences in syntax, phonetics and use of vocabulary between these two languages are primarily a result of the adaptability of both languages to their respective cultural and social variations. For example, the English language is more flexible in respect to how phonetics, intonation, and stress can alter both the meaning of a word or a sentence. In contrast, the pronunciation and intonation of words in the German language tend to be more structured and have stricter phonetic spelling rules. Nevertheless, the manner in which both languages vary still reflect their common origins and will assist individuals in learning either language. Having knowledge of both the English and German languages does not only allow you to be able to communicate with others, but you will also better understand and appreciate European culture, history, and societies.

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