



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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GERMAN LANGUAGE SPECIFIC INFORMATIONAL REPORT

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German Language

Writing System:

- The earliest known examples of written German date from the 8th century AD and consist of fragments of an epic poem, the *Song of Hildebrand*, magical charms and German glosses in Latin manuscripts. A short Latin-German dictionary, the *Abrogans*, was written during the 760s.



Where Spoken :

- German has about 121 million speakers in **Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Belgium, Italy**, France, Denmark, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the USA, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Australia, South Africa and Namibia.

Regional Varieties

Low, Middle, and High German

Like English, **German is a pluricentric language** with three main areas of usage (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland).

- ❖ Low German (north of the [Benrath line](#)) did not take part in the second vowel change in 7th and 8th century A.D. The second vowel change affected esp. German consonants *p*, *t* and *k* which were transformed to *pf/f*, *ts/s* and *ch*.

Examples:

English: to sit German: sitzen Low German: sitten

English: to make German: machen Low German: maken



(Neuschwanstein Castle, www.castles.org, 2000)

Low German often shares more characteristics with Dutch and English.

- ❖ Middle German is spoken in the southern portion of Germany and High German is spoken in Austria.
- ❖ Switzerland developed its own local dialects of the vernacular Swiss /German which is unintelligible even to Germans and Austrians.

Other interesting facts:

Historically and linguistically, standard German is a mixture of [Middle German](#) and [High German](#) (i.e. most Austrian dialects). It did not develop out of one regional dialect but was artificially created by poets, philosophers and scholars.

Varieties of German used in writing

High German (Hochdeutsch)

High German began to emerge as the standard literary language during the 16th century. Martin Luther's translation of the Bible, which he completed in 1534, marks the beginning of this process. The language he used, based partly on spoken German, became the model for written German.

Swiss German (Schweizerdeutsch or Schwyzerdütsch)

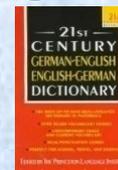
A variety of German spoken by about 4 million people in Switzerland, occasionally appears in writing in novels, newspapers, personal letters and diaries.

- Regional dialects of German, or *Mundarten*, also occasionally appear in writing; mainly in 'folk' literature and comic books such as Asterix.

Linguistic features of English that present most difficulty for Germans

German and English phonological system are similar which makes it easier to learn.

- ❖ Phonemes: There are 25 phonemes compared to 44 in English
- ❖ Grammar Points: German language is similar to English in that the word order is subject + verb + other element:
 “Ich sehe dich.” ("I see you.")
- ❖ However Germans like to begin a sentence with something other than the subject so it is important to remember that no matter how the sentence order changes, the verb is always in second place.
- ❖ German accents include precise articulation and a different intonation including short stops before initial vowels and a lower pitch. Also, some compound word groups have stress on the first word unlike English.



Aspects of Writing

Common Mistakes



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German speakers make the same spelling errors as other English learners by substituting German letters for English sounds.

- *raund (round) abaut (about) wery (very)*

Also, nouns are written with capital letters:

- *He sold his Bike to a Student.*

German language has gender. Nouns and pronouns are masculine, feminine or neuter.

- *Bob's watch has the wrong time. Can you fix her?*

Common Mistakes

Non-Finite Forms: There is not equivalent in German for the “ing” form (gerund):

- *Instead of to walk (walking), they started to run.*

German has past perfect, past and present perfect tenses but no progressive forms:

- *What do you look at?*



Future Tense: There is no equivalent of the “going to” future. The present is used to refer to the future:

- *I promise I (will/shall) bring it back tomorrow.*

Common Mistakes

Modal Verbs: Rough equivalents lead to mistakes.

- ❖ Ich kann is used with a language to mean I can speak it. *Example: I can French.*
- ❖ German past tense musste (had to) looks like English word (must).

Example: Yesterday, I must go to school.

Punctuation is similar except that commas are used before all subordinate clauses, semi-colons are used less often in English, and quotation marks are written differently.

„How can I help you?“ he asked.

Common Mistakes

German common plural endings are -en and -er. Beginner learners sometimes drop the -s from English plural nouns that end in them.

Example: I have two sister.

Although many German and English words have the same roots (*haus/house schuh/shoe*) there are “false friends” who have completely different meanings.

Example: Thank you (*Danke* can mean no thank you) or bring (*bringen* can mean bring or take)

- ❖ Also confusing is who (German *wer*) and where (German *wo*)
- ❖ German word *bitte* (*please*) is used when offering something or as a reply to thanks (like “not at all”). This leads to misuse of the word “please” in English.

German Communication Style



Rules that must be followed in communicative interactions :

- * Germans dislike wide gestures, animated facial expressions and conversational overlap. Interrupting another speaker is regarded as very rude.
- * Germans have firm handshakes and make direct eye contact when talking.
- * In Germany, the normal distance while communicating is about an arm's length. It is also a low-contact culture, so expect little physical contact beyond the obligatory handshake.
- * It is rude (as well as against the law) to tap one's forehead while looking at another person. This is a potential problem for business visitors from the UK and Spain where the same gesture means "I am very clever?" rather than "You are an idiot."
- * If a German suddenly raises his eyebrows at you during a meeting he is probably complimenting you for having come up with a good idea or a clever remark. This could confuse Americans to whom raised eyebrows signify skepticism as well.
- * "Have a nice day!" Knowing how to say something does not mean that you should. In Germany, it is considered insensitive to tell someone to have a nice day. It is also considered odd to smile at a stranger. In fact, Germans consider smiling for no reason as a sign of being simple minded.

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