

The German Language

A satirical look, seen from the eyes of the American Patrick Schmidt

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Many people wanting to learn German as a foreign language have absolutely no idea what the proverb “Deutsche Sprache, schwere Sprache” really means. For the foreign student who is trying to master this language, it seems like a mysterious logic of communication designed to go against every rule of good common sense.

For example, to be taken seriously as a German speaker, one must conceal the meaning of a sentence until the very last word. Take the following excerpt (literally translated) from a recent newspaper article:

“The government announced today, that the Finance Minister the new income tax system because of its new format with a self fill-in procedure, which many outside observers it fairer describe, and its simpler write off system, already in other European countries applied, from the first of January of the new year introduced be will”.

Although it is supposed to be eloquent, it sounds more like Teutonic verse gone amok, leaving the listener confused and stunned.

This explains why Germans have a tic, called “temporary paralysis”. This tic is always noticed by foreigners when observing Germans listening to someone. They are intensely waiting for the speaker to tell them the last word, and when it is finally announced, you see an expression of climactic relief on their faces. And if the telephone rings or the baby starts crying before the verb is expressed, they often miss the meaning of the sentence. Then the poor German is left hanging with a large, incomplete sentence in his head not knowing what was said.

This obsession with the verb at the end leads to comical situations. Imagine the following situation. A young man, let us call him Hans, is declaring his love to a young woman. The phrase “Ich habe dich lieb” goes something like this: “Gretchen, I have you, for the factual reasons of the beauty of your eyes, your little rosebud mouth, your thoroughly trained sporty body and last but not least your wonderful deep, sexy Marlene Dietrich voice, love.” Unfortunately, Gretchen had to answer the ringing doorbell midway through this rambling discourse, and therefore missed Hans’ declaration of love. Despite the inattentiveness of many non-native speakers (what I suspect is boredom), the Germans still get a sensuous thrill when the language is used in this awkward, confusing manner.

But if that isn’t bad enough, the German language compounds the problem with the large number of verbs. The general rule, as far as I can make out, is the more the merrier.

Therefore, German sentences have lots of “haben sind gewesen gehabt worden können geworden sein”. It really sounds like a musical merry-go-around, allowing Germans to make themselves sound self-important, but it is not supposed to be taken at all seriously.

Even more awkward is the German habit of putting many words into one. The words “Donaudampfschiffahrtsgesellschaftskapitän” or “Endbindungsstationsschwesternaufenthaltsraum” are gigantic, mumbo-jumbo sayings, whose sole function is to terrify the unfortunate foreign language student into thinking that the learning of German is a hopeless cause right from the very beginning!

The German language’s handling of the gender, or how nouns are classified according to sex, is total chaos. Take, for example, the noun ‘sun’, which symbolizes power, destruction, force. For some inexplicable and bizarre reason, it has the feminine gender *die*. The noun ‘moon’, on the other hand, which is the symbol of tranquility, intuition and passivity is given the masculine gender *der*. But the biggest surprise is the classification of the nouns ‘young girl’ and ‘heart’, which are given the neutral gender *das*, presumably to indicate that they are not supposed to have any feelings or sex at all! How the poor foreign student is able to detect logic in this ridiculous classification system is beyond me.

However, the ultimate tragedy of a language system gone mad are the word endings. When someone wishes to express something in German, each part of the sentence must first be thoroughly analysed, so that the words have proper endings. To understand the system requires a monumental intellectual effort that only a masochistic genius might want to attempt. Take the simple phrase “the big hamburger”, which in German is “der grosse Hamburger”. If this is in the accusative case, then it becomes “den grossen Hamburger”. Using the preposition “with”, it changes to the dative and the endings change - “mit dem grossen Hamburger”. “The catsup of the big hamburger” is the genitive case or the possessive, which in German is “der Ketchup des grossen Hamburgers “.

At this point, the person attempting to speak German begins to feel a sense of numb horror. But dealing with the plural is even worse, further traumatizing the already linguistically battered student. Rather than to continue tormenting your mind, it is better to enter a MacDonald’s restaurant in Germany and give your order for a big hamburger in plain simple English than to stumble around with this grammatical hodge podge.



«Should I give my order in English or German at McDonald’s?»