

CHALLENGES OF LEARNING GERMAN LANGUAGE FOR ENGLISH
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Abstract

This article explores the difficulties that English speakers face while learning German language as a second or third language. Learning German as an English speaker presents several unique challenges, despite some similarities between the two languages. The main difficulties stem from differences in grammar, vocabulary, and learning strategies, as well as issues related to motivation and available resources. The most significant challenges include mastering German grammar, developing learning autonomy, and overcoming differences in language structure and teaching methods. The analysis highlights the key areas of difficulty, including the complexity of German's case system, the use of grammatical gender, verb placement in subordinate clauses, and the pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds such as *ch* and *umlauts*. Additionally, the study examines the impact of false cognates, rigid article rules, and the cultural nuances embedded in formal and informal address. Drawing on linguistic theory and learner experience, the article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the cognitive and practical hurdles English speakers must overcome, while also offering insight into strategies for more effective language acquisition.

Keywords: learning German, English speakers, challenges of German language, language difference, grammatical difference.

Learning a new language is always a challenge, and for English speakers, German presents a unique mix of familiar elements and unexpected complicity. While both languages share a common Germanic origin, which provides a helpful foundation, the path to fluency is far from straightforward. From mastering cases and grammatical gender to navigating long compound words and pronunciation quirks, learners often find themselves grappling with aspects of German that have not direct counterpart in English. This article explores the specific difficulties English speakers encounter when learning German, shedding light on the linguistic hurdles and offering insights into why they arise.

According to Natalia Broysko German is often cited as major obstacle for English speakers. The complexity of German gender nouns, cases, and verb placement can be difficult to master, especially since these features are less prominent or absent in English. There is a lack of modern, effective teaching materials and methodologies specifically designed for learners who already know English. Inadequate preparation of teachers and insufficient resources can hinder progress, making it harder for students to develop strong language skills [2020]. Bong Tze Yeng mentioned that learners often struggle with grammatical competence and require targeted strategies to overcome these hurdles [2018]. However, there are some strategies that may help learning German language easier. Wassamill Watcharakaweelip recommend that learning German by comparing with English can be helpful, drawing explicit comparisons between two languages can enhance understanding and competence. Leveraging prior knowledge of English help students to grasp new concept in German more effectively [2022]. In addition, bong Tze Yeng highlighted the role of translation while learning German, Many learners find translation between English and German helpful, especially when they encounter unfamiliar structures or vocabulary. Translation can serve as a bridge, aiding comprehension and supporting learning strategies, though some prefer to avoid it for more immersive experience [2018].

Learning a new language is never easy, and German offers English speakers a special blend of well-known vocabulary and surprising differences. Although the Germanic roots of both languages share a common Germanic origin, which provides a helpful foundation, the path to fluency is far from straightforward. Learners frequently have difficulty with features of German that have no direct equivalent in English, ranging from learning cases and grammatical gender to navigating complex compound phrases and peculiar pronunciations.

One of the primary difficulties English learners encounter when learning a German is its grammar. German's case system (nominative, accusative, dative, and genitive) determines the role of the nouns and pronouns in a sentence, whereas English mainly relies on word order and has minimal case usage. This makes German to learn with difficulty in case system, especially when combined with gendered nouns (das, die, der).

Another challenge in learning German is pronunciation and phonetics. Even though German and English have the same ancestor language, pronunciation may still pose challenges. In order to pronounce the words correctly, such as "r," the "ch" in "ich" or "Buch," and the umlauts (ä, ö, ü) requires practice and instruction. As a result, it can lead to pronunciation issues and hesitation in communication.

There are numerous compound and long words in German that might seem frightening at first glance. Certain terms, such as "Geschwindigkeitsbegrenzung" (speed restriction), might be challenging to deconstruct and comprehend. Indeed, there are some shared vocabulary between two languages (cognates), false friends- meaning words that look similar but give another meaning- can cause confusion. Take this word as an example:

Bekommen means "to receive" not "to become"

In contrast to English, each noun in German given a grammatical gender (feminine, masculine, neuter). It is vital to learn these gender by

heart because it affects adjective endings, sentence structure and pronouns. Since there is not any equivalent version of this grammatical rule, English learners find it rather difficult to use. As an example take the word "table" is masculine in German (der Tisch), while "door" is feminine (die Tür) and "window" is neuter (das Fenster). These genders are not always logical or intuitive, which adds to the challenge for English speakers.

Fluency in German also involves understanding its cultural meaning and idiomatic expressions. English speakers might find it hard to understand the meaning of phrases that don't translate literally. For example, "Ich verstehe nur Bahnhof" (literally: "I only understand train station") means "I don't understand anything."

Methodology

This research employs a quantitative research to investigate the challenges English speakers face while learning German as a second language. A survey based method will be used to collect the data from participants, enabling statistical analysis of their difficulties in learning German language

Participants will include university students whose levels are elementary and focuses on the ages of 18 and 20 in Uzbekistan. 50 university students take part in this survey.

Data collection tools

Data is gathered using structured questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into 2 sections:

1. Demographic information: the survey focuses on the ages of 18 and 20. These participants are male and female of university students whose levels are intermediate in German.

2. Challenges they are facing: participants were asked about their difficulties of learning German. This survey allowed participants to share their personal experiences, frustrations, and perceived obstacles in learning German. Furthermore, feedback was also gathered from three experienced German language instructors. Their insights provided a valuable pedagogical perspective on the common errors and difficulties faced by English-speaking learners.

The main data collection tool for this study is a structured questionnaire, developed specifically for this research. It was distributed through Google Forms and participants were given enough time to respond.

Results and findings

The survey was completed by 50 participants, all native English speakers learning German at intermediate levels at present. The data illustrated several patterns in learner experiences, which align with existing literature.

1. Grammar and Case System

According to the survey, the majority (85%) of participants strongly agreed that German grammar is one of the most difficult aspects of the language. Especially, the case system and sentence structure in subordinate clauses were mentioned as key challenges.

2. Pronunciation and Phonetics

70% of participants reported difficulty with German pronunciation, namely with unique sounds including “ch” and umlauts of ä, ö and ü. Learners cited that these sounds are not available in English and require practice.

3. Gender and Articles

90% of participants found grammatical gender difficult, with many expressing frustration at learning articles of der, die, das and using the correct form in speaking and writing.

4. Compound Words and Vocabulary

65% of learners cited that long compound words were tough at first but became manageable with practice. However, majority still have difficulty with false cognates and idiomatic expressions.

5. Listening and Understanding

Only 30% of learners were confident at comprehending native speakers at a natural speaking rate and highlighted listening as an ongoing challenge, especially with regional accents or rapid speech.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although prior knowledge of English has certain benefits (e.g., vocabulary similarities), significant obstacles remain in areas like grammar, gender, and real-time listening comprehension.

Conclusion and recommendations

This research examined the obstacles encountered by English-speaking learners in acquiring German as a second language. Through conducting surveys statistical analysis were taken by the participants' answers in the survey. The main difficulties for learners are case system, sentence structure, unfamiliarity of some phonetic sounds, noun gender and idiomatic expressions.

All things considered, the findings confirm that German language presents some unique and complex challenges for English speakers, requiring both cognitive and cultural adaptation throughout the learning process.

Based on the findings, these recommendations are proposed:

1. Early grammar emphasis from the beginning, language courses should include structured grammar training using real-world examples, with a additional focus on the cases and gender.
2. Learners should expand their vocabulary and knowledge with the native speech. In order to enhance listening skills, learners should engage with daily podcasts, films or news, preferable with subtitles.
3. To memorize nouns with their article, teachers should encourage students to use mnemonics or color-coding system.
4. If they have difficulty in pronunciation, they can use interactive pronunciation tools. Difficulties in German-specific sounds can be addressed with the help of digital pronunciation aids and frequent speaking practices with native speakers via conversation classes or language exchange apps.

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